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No. 42

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK CO.
Cleveland, Ohio

Vol. IV



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Cleveland, Ohio

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THE
ARAB
DETECTIVE
BY EDWIN WHEELER

HE WHIRLED AROUND WITH A LOW STARTLED CRY. A BURLY GYPSY STOOD BESIDE HIM—A
FELLOW WITH A DARK REPULSIVE COUNTENANCE.

The Arab Detective;

OR,

SNOOZER, THE BOY SHARP.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "DENVER DOLL," "SIERRA SAM," "YREKA JIM," "BONANZA BILL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BILLY THE SNOOZER.

"SNOOZER! Yes, sir, that's what they call me," replied a ragged and dirty youth, who, with blacking-brush in hand, stood idly leaning against a lamp-post in front of the new Public Building, Philadelphia, one bright, warm August day—"Billy the Snoozer an' the Gamin Sleuth, ther perlice call me, while ther hard nuts crack me as Snoozer the Snide, the Skinner, the Sniffler, and sech like psalm-book names. Want yer pedestrianators polished, senator?"

"No, thank you," the well-dressed, rather prepossessing, business-looking man answered. He had paused to address the urchin. "I fancy my boots will do quite well for the present. Excuse my seeming inquisitiveness, but I was referred to you as being a pretty shrewd sort of a lad, likely to be of assistance to a person on a blind search. How is it?"

"Dunno. Reckon I know a few p'int about things in general, tho' I allow I don't tackle kindly ter ev'ry sort o' bizness w'ot comes along. Got a case?"

The stranger smiled, while he took a critical survey of the street Arab, who was not an Adonis. Sixteen or seventeen years might possibly have passed over his head, though his size was about that of a boy of twelve, but stoutly built, "chubby," and indications were that he possessed much of a man's strength.

In face he was not handsome, nor was he decidedly homely; there was a something about his dirt-begrimed countenance that was pleasing and intelligent. Then, too, the half-comic expression of the mouth, and the knowing twinkle of a brilliant pair of eyes of dark-blue color, added to the favorable impression he made upon the careful observer.

"Yes, I've got a case," the gentleman answered, surveying the gamin sharply, "which I am not inclined to trust to the professional detectives, preferring the agency of some shrewd, sharp-seeing person, who would work with a will, both in hopes of winning a reputation and winning money."

"Well, now, that hits me like a bannanner, providin' et's honest Injun bizness. I ken't be pulled inter no undertow games, ye see, no more 'n a Philadelfy muskeeter kin play fifteen-ball pool."

"What is your real name?"

"Well, that ain't exactly known, yer see—'pears like my name war kinder obscured under a fog. 'Spect Bill Snoozer is ther furst name I ever know'd, tho' afore that et might 'a' bin

Conklin or Blaine or some other big Injun. Allus did take quite a notion I was ther cast-off kid of some statesman, 'ca'se I take so natterally ter polertix, an' then ther polerticians look so kindly on me, an' I get their shines, 'ca'se they argue I look like Ben Butler. What's your name?"

"My name is Algernon Davis. I am a retired business man."

"Waal, now, that's a hossy old handle, sure's you live, tho' ye orter had Fitz Augustus harnessed onto it. Wouldn't be afeard to tackle Queen Victory wi' sech a handle. S'pect ye ain't on the mash?"

"Hardly, my boy. It is a practice I least of all admire."

"Reckon you're a Quake, eh?"

"I am of Quake descent, to be sure," was the reply, "and proud of it."

"Oh! well, I s'pec' you aire. The Quake's ar' a mighty queer set, but I'll admit they won't cheat ner play dishonest games, orless they git inter ther milk peddlin' bizness. Now, fer instance, I twig an old delegate, who domiciles up West Philadelfy, off Lanc'ster avenue. He says 'ah' and 'um' and 'thee' and 'thou,' till ye can't rest goes ter church three times on Sunday, an' shute me fer a catfish ef he don't peddle ther skinniest milk o' any man in town, an' ther Board o' Health has arrested him fer sellin' impure water, adulterated wi' hen fruit an' chalk."

"Which does not concern the business I have to be done. Come along with me to my office, and I will explain what I want of you."

"Keyrect, as ther lock sed to ther burglar; I'm with you. If you kerry enough capertal above yer assets an' liabilities ter satisfy my modest demands, I presume you an' I kin make a contract. Yea, verily!"

Then there was a merry laugh, followed by a stiff-necked, facial impersonation of a pious Quaker, as the Snoozer marched meekly behind Mr. Davis.

The retired merchant led the way to a cosey library-office of modest size on the second floor of a block on Eighth street, and the two became seated.

"Now, then," announced Mr. Davis, "I have a case for you, which, if you are smart enough to manage, will bring you a handsome reward. Will you undertake it, and pledge yourself not to give it up, until you work out every pair involved?"

"If worthy of the honest efforts of an honest man, yes."

"Well, then, here is a key fitting a door to a compartment in yonder desk, the opening of which, by you, at any time after my death, should I be taken off suddenly, will place in your hand a sufficient sum of money to amply reward you for all your efforts in my behalf. If I live, I will furnish you money, as you may need it, from time to time to carry on your investigation, and when you have satisfactorily performed such duties as the case requires, and shall have won it beyond peradventure, I will give you two thousand dollars. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Phew! I should smile! In the language of Conky at ther Albany deadlock, I should ought

up a cat," the gamin replied, with a grin. "So purceed wi' ther p'int's and I'll register 'em in my nat'ral phonograph, fer reperduktion at future convenience."

"I have not much to tell you that will help you begin your work. Here is all I can give you. I want you to find out the meaning or significance of the contents of this card; and next, the names of those who have anything to do with the meaning."

Billy took the card. Outwardly it was a plain white common card, on which was printed the following in gold:

T. I. V 12—T:S-5—S. D—dig!

—M-N O of G.—

J. S. M 10.

The boy studied the strange inscription curiously for some time, evidently deeply interested in it.

Mr. Davis watched him, and finally said:

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"Nary a bit. Et's a conundrum, thet is. Reckon some one's jest l'arnin' his A. B. C's, an' he's got ther bizness mixed up wi' figgers."

"I do not feel inclined to look at the matter in that light. I feel that the card is an ill-omen to me. I feel—in fact I am fully satisfied—that some wickedly-disposed mysterious band of villains have marked me out as a victim, and are the authors of these cards. I find them nearly everywhere. If I pick up a book, or paper, I am certain to find those same figures and letters before me, arranged in the same order you see them. If I attend a theater, a programme inevitably falls into my lap, bearing the mystic monogram, if such it can be called. My linen has all been indelibly marked with it—I find the inscription upon nearly everything I pick up, until I am nearly driven wild, and am almost inclined to the belief that I am a haunted man."

The gamin was silent, while his eyes were fastened upon the floor, in deep thought; his face was very sober.

"Haunted be hanged," he ejaculated, finally. "Bet my 'kit' ag'in' a three-cent 'schooner' that et's all a put-up job. Why didn't ye invite a reg'lar detective inter this picnic, boss?"

"I have no great amount of faith in the ability or reliability of the major part of them. I laid my case before several, but they seemed to regard the matter as little more than an eccentric notion of mine."

"Guess not. They don't know so much as they might. Reckon thar's heaps o' under-bizness to be rooted out, an' et takes a calf-skin polisher like yer nephew, heer to tumble ter ther embrace. 'Spec' ef I lay ther thing all in shape fer ye, ye'll be willin' ter 'stump' fer me, when I run ag'in' Blaine for next 'chair' up at 'Hatchettown'?"

"You mean the Presidency?"

"I should chuckle."

"Oh! yes—you can count on me."

"All right. Now, then, I'll purceed to give ye a little cross-questioning, perlice-court style. Yer name is Algernon Davis?"

"My name is Algernon Davis."

The bootblack took a dirty memorandum-book

from his pocket, together with a pencil, and made some hieroglyphics in the book that hardly resembled intelligible chirography. Then he proceeded, pausing now and then, to repeat the penciling operation, in a rapid hand:

"Are you married?"

"My wife has been dead these six years."

"Got any progeny?"

"I've one son."

"What fer kind of a rooster is he?"

"Alas! I cannot speak favorably of him, for I fear he has no claim to the title of an honorable man. For the last three months he has been very dissipated and extravagant, so that last month I was forced to turn him from my home, upon his own resources, in hopes that it would make an improvement in him. But I fear it will never have the desired effect."

"What's his handle?"

"His name is Lyle Davis."

"Another hossy handle. Reckon mebbe you're some relation to Jeff Davis, who created a panic durin' ther war in the paper market, a-writin' sockdologies ag'in' ther Union."

"Hardly, I fancy."

"Well, p'r'aps not. Jeff was a hard old bologner, tho', they say—a reg'lar lady-smasher. Got any more children or relashe?"

"No other children of my own blood. I have, however, an adopted daughter, by the name of Bertie, and a nephew by the name of Jack Sedley—one of the nicest young men in the city is Jack. I only wish my boy was like him."

"Reg'lar parasol paragon, is he?"

"A moral and straightforward young man, sir, with very few faults, if I do say it."

"Any more relashions?"

"None in the wide world, to my knowledge."

"Glad o' that. Won't have so many ter over-haul. Got any enemies?"

"None that I know of."

"Well, all ye've got ter do, ef ye want to collect a supply, ar' to run fer offis. They'll make ye out a son-of-a-cook quicker'n a Rhode Island rooster kin swaller a clam. Rosky Conklin tells me et's a good receipt, ter git pussy an' bald-headed. Howsumever, notwithstanding, that ain't to ther p'int. What's ther size o' yer surplus?"

"What do you mean?"

"Yer colatateral—yer exchange—yer capertal! How much inflation d'ye carry?"

"Do you mean how much am I worth?"

"Sart'in. Ye see we o' ther perfesh speak in tecknerkal terms, frum habit, by associatin' wi' bankers, polerticians an' big guns, generally."

"Ha! ha! pretty good of you. Well, my boy, I suppose I may be rated at a couple of hundred thousand, though I flatter myself no one has any idea where it is."

"Ner I don't want to," Billy replied. "All I want's ther p'int's. Reckon I've got enough ter figger on fer a while. Never looked thru this keerd, did ye, toward the light?"

"No; I never thought so far," and the merchant received the card and examined it.

A cry of astonishment escaped his lips, and his face assumed an ashen hue.

The card was transparent when held toward

the light, and revealed two pictures, which otherwise were invisible.

One picture represented a coffin, upon the side of which were the mystic letters and figures before mentioned.

The other was alike to Dante's Inferno, with skeletons, iinps, and his Satanic Majesty in the act of placing a body in a boiling caldron.

Nothing more significant in the way of deadly warning, could well be conceived.

CHAPTER II.

A HELPING HAND.

A SHORT time afterward, when Mr. Davis had somewhat recovered from his astonishment, the Gamin Sleuth took his departure, armed with the strange card, whose picture was significant of death and judgment, but whose mystic lettering yet remained to be solved.

"I'll figger it out, arter bizness hours," he muttered, "that is, ef I can. 'Spect it'll take the editor o' a puzzle paper ter tell ther meanin' o' them letters."

Business was never dull with Billy, and he had all he could do until nightfall, when he gathered up his "kit" and homeward trudged.

A poor sort of home it was, but it was a covering at least, and known as McCarthy's tenement, on a narrow damp street, not far from South street.

Here did Mrs. McCarthy "kape," and among her flock were newsboys and bootblacks, cripples and beggars, with a liberal sprinkling of bummers, thieves and the roughest of the rough. Aside from Mrs. McCarthy, there was but one other of her sex who was bold enough to brave the terrors of the "Dice-Box," as the establishment was known, among the frequenters of it, and residents of the street. This other was a young girl of sixteen, who made it her business to "speculate." Sometimes she bought things and peddled them among poor families; to-day she would purchase a lot of goods, at auction—to-morrow she would bargain them off to those of the poor who seldom step outside their own doors. To-night she would report items for some morning newspaper—to-morrow night she could likely enough be found in front of one of the theaters crying off reserved tickets.

Unless you were closely observant, you were not liable to detect the fact that she was a girl, as she always dressed in male attire of the neatest fit and quality, and her face was just masculine enough to be pretty, and with the aid of a toilet brush a faint tinge, like unto beard, usually ornamented her face.

Her name was Fanchon Flint, though she was mostly addressed as Fan, and sometimes as Cap.

Why she lingered about so rough a den as that kept by Mother McCarthy no one knew; yet she did, and, rough as were the gang, none of them were ever known to speak or whisper a word against her character.

Even the roughest of the *habitués* refrained from offering her insult, because they knew she was chaste, and above all, not afraid to stand up for her own rights. She had her little room

on the second flight, and came and went whenever she pleased, rarely taking her meals in the house.

There was no denying that Mother McCarthy's was the place for ye poor boarders, as she only levied a tax of a dollar per week for board and lodging, and consequently caught her "Dice-Cup" full of the offscourings of Philadelphia, two-thirds of whom were men of drink and questionable repute, who could lose themselves in the old tenement without much danger of the police finding them, while the other third were composed of bootblacks, newsboys and street waifs of nearly every type, to whom the low price of board was the magnet that attracted them to the "hotel."

Board was rather slim, to be sure, but that did not matter to the overruling majority, as Mother McCarthy dispensed liquid fury, more commonly called whisky, for five cents per glass, three glasses of which were warranted to make a man "blind."

Rows were of frequent occurrence in the den, but they were never meddled with by the police, as it was not a good place for less than a score of the blue-coats to visit at once. If a "worthy" was harbored in the den whom the authorities really wanted, they invariably left it for the detectives to secure him rather than for the police force to "make a descent."

But to proceed with our narrative.

Billy the Snoozer having pursued his regular line of business until nightfall, then set out for the Dice-Cup.

On arrival there, he entered the bar-room, and, as was his custom, handed his blacking outfit over to the red-nosed, blear-eyed looking landlady, Mrs. McCarthy, after which he ascended a pair of rickety stairs into the upper portion of the old tenement, followed by not a few scowling glances from the loungers in the groggery.

Men they were whose souls were stained with crime—who were ever at variance with the mandates of the law, and who feared and hated every person who served it.

Billy had a reputation, even among the *habitués* of the Dice-Cup, for being a shrewd fellow, who had on more than one occasion served the law, and it made him no friends among the rascals, who were harbored under Mother McCarthy's protecting wing.

Many an exciting experience had the bootblack had among them, but he had always been lucky enough to get off without getting hurt.

Ascending to the second floor, he traversed a dark, dirty hall for some distance, and knocked at a door.

"Come in," called out a pleasant voice, and he accordingly opened the door, entered the room, and stood in the presence of Fanchon Flint.

Contrary to her usual custom, the girl was now dressed in the attire of her own sex, and engaged in some writing, which she laid aside and welcomed the gamin with a bright smile.

She was a very pretty girl, both in face and figure, and knew how to use her pretty eyes with charming effect when she so felt disposed.

"Got hum, eh?" the boy said, taking a seat near her. "Didn't know's I'd find you. Hew's biz?"

"Rather slow, this week, but then, I've cap-

tured a few dollars. How have you been doing?"

"Bully! Plenty o' dust fixes up plenty o' work fer me. Reckon ef biz keeps lively my savings bank account 'll be big enough so I kin buy up ther Contermental Hotel."

"Well, I hope so, Billy. I'll go in partnership with you, then."

"Ye don't mean it, Fan?"

"Bet I do! Hav'n't I always told you I was going to have you, when you got enough laid by to buy a home?"

"Yas, I know you have, but I reckoned you was only gassin'."

"Not a bit of it! I've known you too long not to know what you're good for, and I guess you ain't slow in reckonin' that it's a cold day when a human squeezes in a deal over me."

"You bet. You're flip enuff fer any of 'em, an' ye kin consider et a bargain thet I'll take ye fer better or worse, soon as I git a foreign ministry, or elected to Congress. Fer ther present, however, I reckon I've got a job as'll tax both our wits, an' eff ye help me out wi' et, I'll divy—tho, I reckon I could figger et out alone, but would ruther hev you take a hand in et."

Then he related, in substance, the points of his interview with Mr. Algernon Davis, to all of which Fanchon listened attentively.

"Let me see the strange card," she said, "and perhaps I may be able to make something out of it."

The Snoozer accordingly submitted it for her inspection, and she was engrossed in silent study of it for some time.

"I fail to solute," she said, finally, with a smile. "I see the secret pictures, and comprehend this much. A band of rascals are evidently working on Mr. Davis—a band, too, which is systematically organized, and know their biz. I should judge they were either figuring with a view of extorting money from him, or else they have a deeper scheme and purpose to carry it out after his death."

"Don't savy what the figgers mean an' the letters, eh?"

"No. There is a wide chance for guess in regard to their true meaning. I should suspect that they are initials, which stand for the title of some infamous Order."

"Just my way of thinking. Know any thing about Jack Sedley or Lyle Davis?"

"Nothing publicly of Sedley, although I have somewhere heard the name mentioned. Lyle Davis I have frequently seen—a fellow who'd be a good-looker, if he'd let whisky alone. He is frequently to be found in the gambling rooms along Vine or Walnut streets. Judging by his appearance when I last saw him, it won't take long to fetch him to 'snakes.'"

"Humph! what a fool! Ther old man has got lots o' tin, an' I reckon et's some one's duty ter reform ther kid so he will be fit to gather in the parental shekels, when my client passes off."

"Don't think it would be worth while trying. They say the girl, who is his adopted sister, refused to have him, and that's what drove him to the bad."

"Guess I'll have to go round an' interview her one o' these days. Ain't much o' a charmer, myself, but 'speat mebbe I might give her a few

p'int ter cogitate on. In the mean time, you'll keep yer eyes open, won't ye, an' luk out fer news?"

"You bet I will—allus count on me, when there's anything I can do to help you, Billy."

"Know'd it, Cap, an' you jest calculate the Snoozer appreciates sech leetle favors," the boot-black said, shaking hands, and then departing.

For several days thereafter the gamin saw nothing of Mr. Davis, nor did he learn anything relative to the case he had undertaken to ferret out.

Fully cognizant of the fact that he must earn a few dimes even while working up the case, he did not forsake his box and brush, and was daily seen along his accustomed beat, working industriously when an opportunity offered.

He was taking a noon recess one day, about a week after the events last related, in the little park immediately back of the antiquated structure, Independence Hall, when something occurred which he took in quite surprisedly.

A couple of dandified, flashily-attired young fellows entered the park from the Chestnut-street side at about the same moment that a shabby, used-up-looking chap came into view from the direction of Walnut street, and the trio advanced toward each other over the walk which led from one corner of the little park to the other.

The eyes of the Snoozer involuntarily watched both parties.

To his surprise the two dandies halted as they neared the bumper, and appeared to address some remark to him, to which he replied; then the best-appearing dandy of the two quickly raised his hand in a sort of twirl about his head, and the tramp dropped to the ground.

The same moment that he fell the two sports made their way out of Independence Park, quickly, into the larger square, directly across the street, where a large party of picnickers were assembled, with a view, no doubt, of losing their identity in the crowd.

For the instant Billy was so taken by surprise as to be unable to give an alarm, but in a second more he regained his voice, and shouted lustily:

"Perlice! perlice!"

A blue-coated "solid" man immediately appeared upon the scene.

"Hello! what's wrong?" he demanded, approaching the young sleuth.

"Look thar!" the boy replied, indicating the chap who lay prone upon the walk. "Two dandy kids jest passed him, spoke 'im, an' drapped him wi' a slung-shot."

"Where are they now?"

"Oh! they slid over into the square. Two gallus sports in light coats, blue pants, an' plug hats, ter say nothin' about lavender kids, ivory-headed canes an' eyeglasses, an' both had cream-colored darling little sissy mustaches, w'ot ain't bin hatched long."

The cop laughed at the gamin's odd description, and appointing another officer who had arrived on the spot to look after the wounded man, he slid off in search of the manipulators of the slung-shot.

Billy accompanied the other cop, and assisted

him to trot the "lay" man to the nearest station-house, where remedies were applied that soon brought him to his senses.

Drunk though he may have been at the time of being struck, he was now thoroughly sobered, and withstood the pain of having the wound upon his forehead dressed without a murmur. It was only a flesh cut, but might have resulted more seriously, for it was close in the vicinity of the temple where the treacherous weapon had struck.

When he was sufficiently restored, the unfortunate was subjected to an examination.

He gave his name as Lyle Davis. When asked his business, said he had none—that he had no employment at present.

When asked if he knew the man who knocked him down, he said that he did, but preferred not to make any complaint against him.

The judge recommended that the prisoner pay five dollars into the treasury for being a vagrant, whereupon Davis stated that he had no money, nor did he know of any place he could get any, and the judge was about to humanely (?) send him up for thirty days, when the Snoozer stepped forward and paid his fine out of his own earnings, and the wealthy ex-merchant's son was discharged.

Turning to the gamin, he extended his hand, while tears of gratitude stood in his eyes, as he said:

"Thank you, Johnnie. Though I don't know you, I know that you are at least 'white!'"

CHAPTER III.

BILLY'S CASE IN HAND.

FROM that simple speech Billy the gamin knew that Lyle Davis had not sunk so far into the slough of despond but what he could yet be raised and reformed.

Except for a red face, bloodshot eyes and slovenly, ragged attire, he was by no means a bad-looking fellow—indeed, he was possessed of a rather handsome form and features, with a graceful mustache, curling brown hair, and a good-shaped head.

By far too smart appearing fellow was he to be left to a life of dissipation, and the Snoozer formed an immediate resolve to "put him dead to rights," as he termed it.

"You're welcum ter the help," he said, "an' I want ye to come along wi' me a bit."

Davis obeyed. He felt grateful toward the bootblack who had so unexpectedly turned his friend, and he followed.

Billy led the way to a quiet beer garden near the center of the city, and the two became seated facing each other with a table between them.

"Now, see yer'!" the bootblack began, fetching his dirty fist down upon the table with an emphatic thump; "fu'st of all, ther order o' this convention is, no beer!"

Davis's face fell at this. He had evidently been expecting that his new acquaintance was going to "set 'em up."

Billy saw the somewhat sorrowful expression, and went on;

"No, sir-ee, huckster bob-tail hess, no beer. Mebbe you like it, boss, but I say you can't hev any. D've know what ye'r' cummin' tew, a-suckin' beer an' seeh like?"

Davis uttered a reckless laugh.

"Delirium tremens, eventually, in all probability, so I've been told," he replied, without any apparent concern.

"Thet's it, precise; next, a pauper's grave. Now, ye couldn't hit it straighter, an' ye've got to stop afore it's too late."

"Stop?" The idea seemed to surprise him.

"Yes, stop short, never to drink ag'in," Billy announced. "Now, look yer'—ye ain't no fool. Ther's heaps o' brains in yer pate, an' yer got to brace up an' be a man. Ye'r' bringing yer dad in gray ha'rs to ther sepulcher, an' diggin' yer own four-by-seven ter boot."

"You seem to know me, then?"

"Know ye? Guess I do—from Z ter anna dominy. Know yer dad, too—know ther hull circumstances. Why, you're a flat, you are—a reg'lar piece o' punky timber only fit ter kindle fires with. Went an' purposed ter yer best gal, an' because she sed nay, off you goes inter a woe-be-gone drunk. Why, ye orter be shot. S'pose a female ked turn my head in thet shape? Waal, I s'u'd chuckle *nix cum-a-rous!* Et shows inexperience on yer part. Thar's ther time, fer instance, I bounced Belinda McGraw to come over, and she clubbed me with a clothes-prop, fer my impudence. Jest s'posin I'd went an' sed 'hyar goes,' an' committed suicide? Phew! wouldn't thar been a breeze! Waal, I should shudder! How old Blaine, Rosky Conk., an' all ther big guns, inkludin' Jay Gould, would 'a' raved an' tore their hair, 'cause I wa'n't around ter dust up their boots; an' I do b'lieve Belinda McGraw would o' inaugurated a forty-candle wake, in tune ter the 'casion. Jes' ther same in yer case—the boss is nigh distracted, an' contemplates rushin' pell-mell inter polertix, while yer Sunday best gal has amputated so much o' her own capillary persessions thet she's had ter buy out a hull hair an' wig-maker's shop ter patch over her baldness; fact, by blackin'!"

Then the Snoozer paused and drew a long breath, preparatory to a resumption act, while Lyle Davis gave vent to a real, natural, hearty laugh.

"I guess you lie about the hair business," he said. "She led me on to suppose I was the favorite, and then jilted me, and it drove me to recklessness, I'll admit."

"Pooh! You thought she jilted you, and waltzed right off, leavin' yer cousin, Jack Sedley, an opportunity to waltz right in. As a result, ef you keep on jugglin' coffin-filler over yer palate, furst you know you'll be takin' a ride around ter the coroner's, an' Jack Sedley will be enjoyin' yer rights; that's the sizin' of that, by blackin'!"

"Do you think so?"

"I know so. By the by, et was this same Jackson who perlately tapped ye over, in the park."

"How do you know?"

"I surmise. Ain't et so?"

"Perhaps."

"Thort so. I've got his figger-head registered on my mental log-book, as I onc't heerd an old salt say. Now, Lyle Davis, take my advice—shet down on budge! Promise me that ye will, an' I'll help ter put ve solid on yer taps ag'in—I will, by ther eternal boots!"

"I fear it would be useless for me to promise you, my young friend," Davis replied, a clouded expression returning to his face. "I know I am going to the deuce as fast as a mortal well can go, and if those who were once my friends do not care to interest themselves in my case, why should you, a stranger?"

"Because I know thar's suthin' in store fer you wu'th livin' for. I tell ye life is precious, ef a feller does occasionally git in ther way o' passin' lamp-posts an' git his brains butted out. Compare ther ragged edge o' life wi' the smooth deceptive muzzle of a razzor, an' I'll take life fer mine. Now, mind yer, I kin git two dollars a day fer doin' no more than shinin' up politer-cal boots, an' ye don't s'pose I'd be monkeyin' around a-tryin' ter persuade you, ef I didn't think et war a reg'lar Sunday-skule, Fourth o' Julia act o' charity, an' humanerty? No, sir-ee, huckster! I tell ye, thar's use fer you, yet, whar ye kin brace up; be a man, an' above all in the long run git revenge. Now, you listen, while I labor."

And, then, fishing a stub of a cigar from his pocket, and lighting it, he spoke rapidly, in an undertone.

Occasionally he would intersperse his words with grotesque gesticulations, which would sometimes succeed in arousing a smile upon young Davis's cheeks, as he listened attentively.

"There. What d'ye say on that?" the boot-black sleuth asked, as he drew to a close. "Ain't that better'n settin' fire ter yerself wi' old beenzeen? Can't ye go a whack on thet lay-out?"

Davis was silent several minutes, his gaze fixed steadfastly on the floor. It seemed as if he was giving the bootblack's argument a careful consideration, before coming to a definite decision.

"I don't know but you are right," he said, finally, "and I think I'll try, though I'll not vouch for how long I'll stay sober. Ten to one, if the excitement isn't enough to drown my troubles, you'll find me dead drunk some time when you most need me. I'm as uncertain as a town clock."

"Then, you'll have to be regulated, accordingly," averred Billy. "Come along, now, an remember ye are ter feel si'k at yer stummik, when ye want to drink, an' ye'll be O. K."

And they left the place together.

It would not have been strange to have seen the Davis mansion ablaze with light, at any time when Lyle had been his father's favorite, for in those days merry parties were of frequent occurrence, and they were 'most always going on at the house, or on the extensive grounds, which partook of festivity.

But of late all had been strangely quiet, in this respect. Mr. Davis, Sr., came and went regularly, to be sure, and Miss Bertie and Jack Sedley sometimes rode out in the barouche or on horseback, but the stately home and its surroundings, wore not the pleasant mantle of a few months before.

People in that fashionable circle gossiped, of course, but it finally wore down to a settled conclusion that Lyle had gone to the dogs, as it were, and Jack, who had stepped gracefully in to fill

his place, would eventually marry Bertie, and inherit the whole thing, and that would be the end of it.

But about a week after Lyle's promised attempt at reformation, there was a grand affair at the Davis mansion.

A *fete* and ball were given, in celebration of Miss Bertie's nineteenth birthday, and of course no pains were spared to make it the sensation of that aristocratic neighborhood.

Of all the proud old mansions in the northern extremity of the city, commanding a view of the silvery, winding Delaware, none boasted of finer grounds than that of Algernon Davis.

To-night the grounds were brilliantly illuminated, and the mansion lighted in every part, and filled with the gayest of the fashionables, while not a few strolled about the grounds, listened to the music of McClurg's band, and enjoyed the occasion.

Here, there, and everywhere, darted the fair young hostess, a lady of thorough refinement and great personal beauty, her sole motive seeming to be to add to the enjoyment of those who had flocked around her to make her natal eve an eve of pure joyousness.

And it was not until late in the evening that the heir-prospective found a chance to speak to the flushed, excited birthday fairy, in the conservatory, where she stood inhaling the delicious fragrance with which the air was pregnant.

"Ha! ha! at last I have you, my pretty bird," Sedley said—a tall, graceful young man, not homely by any means, with brown hair and mustache, regular features, and exquisite attire. "I was almost in despair of getting a chance to speak to you, you are so very busy."

She looked up at him, with her pretty trustful eyes, in surprise.

"Was there anything important you wished to say, Mr. Sedley?" she innocently asked, as she plucked a silver geranium leaf and pinned it upon her bosom.

"You know there is, Bertie, or else you are very forgetful," he said, stepping closer. "You were to give me my answer to-night, you know."

She flushed a little, and a strange, frightened look entered her eyes.

"Did I promise that?—then it was very, very wrong in me. How could I stop just now, amid all the excitement, to consult even the will of my own heart? Impossible, Mr. Sedley; you will have to wait until after the guests go home; then you will find me in the private drawing-room, and I will answer you."

Then she fluttered away to mingle with the revels of those who had come to do her honor, while Jack Sedley went out to a lonely rustic arbor overlooking the moonlit Delaware, and lit a cigar.

"Curse the guests!" he muttered, his brow darkening; "I would they were away that I could end this suspense by learning her final answer. I shall give her no peace until I get it, whether it be good or bad, and if she refuses me, then—"

He did not finish the sentence in words, but the threatening expression that came over his face was more effective than words could

possibly have been; it meant evil, in the fullest sense.

And while he sat there his face was clouded and gloomy, and his eyes gleamed with feverish eagerness.

"It is now or never," he muttered. "Gradually things are nearing a point where something must be done, and I'll be blamed if matters are over promising for me, despite the favorable outlook. Vague fears constantly assail me that something will leak out, ere matters can be brought to a climax. If such should be the case, I fancy I'd have to work for my position, for it would seem as if some unlucky turn had set my cousin once more to rights."

He had failed to notice a man's approach to a position within a few feet of Sedley, where he halted and folded his arms across a massive chest.

He was a person of extreme corpulency. His arms were nearly as large as an ordinary man's leg, and his face was full, red, and repulsively wrinkled, with a pair of blood-shot eyes, a shock of reddish hair, and large ears.

A grunt of recognition from him was the first appraisal Sedley had of his presence.

"You?" he articulated.

"Sammy, the Soaker, in person," was the rejoinder.

"What brings you here?"

"Business. Want 'tin!"

"You know better than to seek me here. Go back to the old place, and I'll see you later."

"Nix!" Samuel retorted, calmly. "I want 'rocks,' an' want 'em now!"

CHAPTER IV.

DAVIS PLACE.

DURING the hight of the gayety, Mr. Davis, growing weary of the babble of voices, wandered forth into the fresh air of his grounds.

His footsteps took him down to the edge of his property, just outside of which, on the common, a band of Gypsies were camped for the night.

As he stood looking over the fence at their picturesque tents, gleaming camp-fires, and their own flitting, rudely-attired forms, one of their number, a maiden, attired unlike the others, in bright-colored skirt, waist, stockings, and slippers, seeing him, approached him. Her sharp eyes had discovered him even amid his own grounds and shrubbery.

"Have your fortune told, sir?" she asked, bowing low. "Only a dollar, sir. Can tell you all about the past, present and future."

"Of the past I have no particular wish to know. Of the present and future—well, I don't mind listening to your prattle. It will amuse me, I suppose."

"You do not believe in fortune-telling, I see, but you will change your mind. Give me your left hand, please."

Mr. Davis extended his hand, and she studied it attentively.

"You have a son, who, by dissipation, has caused you great sorrow; but never fear—this is the least of all your troubles for he will eventually come around all right. It is from another source you must anticipate trouble; a dark

cloud is overhanging you that threatens you, but in what way I cannot explain to-night, more than that you are on the eve of a severe sickness, and I would advise you to choose well your attending physician. If you have a trusted family doctor, employ him by all means."

"Is this all you can tell me?"

"No. I could prophesy much, but I don't want to, sir, as it would not benefit your peace of mind. When I find such a case as yours, I'd much rather bury what secrets I learn in my own heart. You are a rich man, and unprincipled rascals are plotting your ruin. Look out for them. Take no heed of the means being taken to annoy you—by this I mean the combination of letters and figures."

"Ha! how know you anything about this business?"

"By the same gift that I know a little of everybody's business. Some people call it humbug! I call it gift, prescience, supernaturalism, if you will."

"Can you tell me where my son is to-night?"

"He is in the city—sober!"

"Thank God for that, if it is true. Can you tell me who it is I am to guard against?"

"No. I never warn one person against another; but when I foresee treachery, I always personally make an effort to thwart it. For the present watch everybody, study everybody—look out for everybody!"

"Thank you, young lady, I will not forget your advice. I am deeply impressed with your revelation and yourself. Will you give me your name?"

"Oh! yes. My band call me Zella."

"Zella, eh? But that is not your own true name?"

"How do you know?"

"I don't know; I infer so."

"Inferences are sometimes as baseless as quicksand. I must now bid you good-evening."

"Good-evening, fair fortune-teller," Mr. Davis said, more lightly than was his wont, and then turned away.

Zella rapped smartly on the fence and checked his retreat.

"You have forgotten something, haven't you?"

"Ah! have I—what?" and he looked puzzled.

"Oh! the dollar; that's all."

"Well, well! Blame my forgetfulness, to be sure. Here is a gold piece. Take it as your pay."

And tossing her a ten-dollar coin, he hurried away, lest she should refuse to accept it.

Zella did not immediately return to her camp; she stood at the fence there in the flooding moonlight, and gazed after Mr. Algernon Davis with wistful eyes—stood there half-dreamily, until a heavy footstep sounded upon the grass behind her, and a heavy hand was laid upon her shoulder.

She whirled around with a low, startled cry. A burly Gypsy stood beside her—a fellow with a dark, repulsive countenance, sweeping black mustache and gleaming eyes.

"Well?" he interrogated, "did ye make a raise?"

"Yes, I made a raise. Why?"

"Then I want the cash."

The girl took a dollar silver piece from her pocket and she grabbed it eagerly.

"Is that all you've got?" he demanded, greedily.

"It's all you'll get," she retorted, breaking from him and running away to the camp.

The man gazed after her half-savagely.

The guests did not leave until late that night, consequently Jack Sedley did not get his answer as soon as he wished.

He wandered often into the conservatory, hoping that Bertie would follow him, but she did not.

Finally every guest was gone, and he found her in a little private parlor, partly reclining upon a sofa, while Mr. Davis occupied an easy-chair near her.

If Sedley was surprised at this he did not betray it, but nodded pleasantly and became seated.

Mr. Davis broke the silence in a business-like way.

"Jack," he said, "my adopted child tells me that you have been paying her loverly attentions, and you are now awaiting her answer to your proposal of marriage!"

"That is the fact, uncle," Sedley replied. "I have asked Bertie to join fortunes with me, and anxiously hope that she will decide favorably to my wishes."

"Ah! yes. Well, sir, marriage is a grave affair, and before a young couple take the bridal vows, which in the eyes of Almighty God never can be revoked, it is well that they should consider all things. Are you quite sure no other woman has any claim upon you, sir?"

"Why, of course."

"What business are you following, now?"

"I am reporter for the Chicago —, and several other papers, sir."

"How much means have you?"

"A thousand dollars, sir."

"The price of one of Bertie's best dresses, boy. How do you intend to keep a wife?"

"Oh! I anticipate—I expect—"

"You expect to step into my shoes, when I have the condescension to step out, eh? Well, sir, let that be the least of all your anticipations."

"I anticipate—in fact, expect a job as teller in the — National Bank, next week, at a salary quite sufficient for our wants. Far from wanting your money, sir, I should be pleased to have Cousin Lyle have it all, if capable of handling it, as I do not wish to ever be twitted of selfish or avaricious motives."

"Well said, my boy! Never depend on dead men's shoes. Let me tell you that all my fortune, except this estate, is contained in bonds. Whoever gets Bertie, if deserving, will have a part of this money. This estate belongs to my reprobate son, as long as he may live, and will be handed down then to his heirs."

"Bertie, my child, do you love your adopted cousin, as a wife should love a husband—do you love him better than Lyle?"

"No, sir; I never did nor shall I ever love another man in the same way that I love Lyle. I, however, think a great deal of Mr. Sedley, and am willing to marry him."

"And are you willing to take her, Jack, under these circumstances?"

"I am—more than willing, dear uncle. I care not what affection she may have had for Lyle, I am sure she will ever be a dear wife to me."

"Then, I tender my consent and approval of the match, and wish you life-long happiness and prosperity."

Shaking hands with both, Mr. Davis retired, and the lovers were left to plight their troth.

No! no! no!

Bertie Davis did not love Jack Sedley, as she did Lyle—poor dissipated Lyle, and yet she gave him her hand, and when he had told her that he loved her, and her only, she consented to give him her hand in marriage.

The following day Sedley had business out of town, and didn't get back until just dark, and was leaving the railway station, when he was accosted by no less a personage than Billy, the Sleuth.

"Say! Hello! Hold up!" he cried. "Ain't ye ther chap w'ot spotted Lyle Davis over ther bazoo wi' a slung-shot?—ain't yer name Jack Sedley?"

"Get out, you little scoundrel!" Sedley growled, fiercely, and thumping Billy over the head with his walking-stick, he sprung into the just starting car, and proceeded to a tenement block in St. Catherine street, wherein he quickly vanished.

When he reappeared, his appearance had undergone a great change, for he wore a slouch hat, and a heavy false beard of a color to match his own.

Proceeding on foot to the next corner, he hailed a cab, and was driven to a respectable-looking brick house, on the corner of two very quiet streets in the northern part of the city.

His summons at the door-bell was answered by a dull-looking Irish girl, of whom he inquired for "Mrs. Hagerty," and was shown into a richly furnished parlor.

The girl then went out, and a few minutes later a buxom dame, with a red face, made her appearance.

"Och! sorry's the news, Mister Jack," she burst out, as she saw him. "Shure tha cage ha' broke open, an' tha bird is gone, tha divil knows where?"

Sedley turned deathly pale.

What secret was here?

CHAPTER V.

THE SLEUTH AT WORK.

"SH!"

It was a single word of admonition, in the familiar voice of Gammin Billy, and in answer to it, he and his companion, a man with long, black beard, rested on their oars, and allowed the momentum of their little skiff to slacken.

The scene was upon the bosom of the Delaware, with the moonlight falling over the rippling waters, as the two midnight voyageurs rowed northward.

"Well, what is the matter?" the black-whiskered man asked.

"Nothin' purtick'ler," was the reply, as Billy looked ahead, through a telescope formed of his

hands; "I only spy a craft ahead, an' I'll bet my hull chances fer ther next presidency that et's our game. I'm a sort o' a two-legged sea-dorg, ye see."

"I see you are a little of everything, my young friend. What shall we do now?"

"As I told ye in ther first place—foller an' watch! Time enough to act, later. Fer the present, we want ter play sic 'em, nup—smell 'em out. If we spot our game, we kin play on ther ace, later in ther day."

So they once more laid to their oars. Ahead, a small black spot on the surface of the water, showed that the party whom Billy pursued were yet pulling steadily on.

"Mebbe they reckernize the fac' that we're after 'em, an' ain't goin' ter stop until we let up," the young Sleuth suggested. "But as I comprehend their game et don't puzzle this lad, at all. Let's pull for shore."

"What! will you give up pursuit?" Lyle Davis demanded, for he it was in the black-beard disguise.

"No. We are not fur from where I calkylate them clams are goin' ter anchor, an' et won't do fer us ter hug 'em too close, or we'll skeer 'em. So we'll jest put ashore, hyar, and make a jog-trot skirmish fer ther objective p'int, which I may as well allude is a skimetry."

"A what?"

"A rural skimetry, wiar they deposit defuncts arter the doctors has got through wi' them."

"Oh! a cemetery, eh? Of all places in the world, what can those fellows want in a cemetery so far from the city?"

"Bones, on course! I reckon you don't know thet cusses like Sammy the Soaker an' Banty the Bum invite 'rocks' ter their treasury by diggin' up cadavers, an' sellin' 'em tew pill-peddlers, eh? Well, that's a fac', an' et's what I've 'spected Sammy o' doin' fer a long time, but couldn't prove it. Ef we don't cotch 'em at et ter-night my name ain't Billy the Snoozer."

They pulled to the right-hand shore and beached their boat, after which the bootblack led off through a series of pasture and cornfields at a rapid gait. Half an hour of this sort of tramp, circuitously inland, from the river, brought them to a solid stone wall, breast high, and judging by the spectral marble slabs and the little mounds, dotted about under the long weird shadows of bordering evergreens within the inclosure, it was a family cemetery.

"Darn my boots! Et looks like there might be h-aps of spirits layin' fer a feller around here," Billy observed, contemplatively. "But they've got to fat up on oysters afore they can skeer me. Are you skeert on ghosts, Davy?"

"I don't know, as I never chanced to encounter one," Lyle said, with a smile. "Where are your ghouls? I don't see them."

"Oh! they haven't got here yet. We come cross-cut, and got in half an hour ahead of 'em. See that?"

He pointed to a grave which had been but recently filled in and heaped up with fresh dirt.

"Some one has been buried there lately," David remarked.

"Yas, an' to-day, I 'spect. There was a

shower yesterday, an' ye kin see there hasn't bin no rain on *that* dirt. So that's the game the roughs 'll tackle. Now, then, you position yerself 'most anywhere ye please, an' don't say booter what ye see. After they go back tew town, we'll lay for an' foller 'em, overloaded wi' teck-nerkle p'int an' the like."

Accordingly they separated, Davis secreting himself at some distance from the new grave, while Billy kept in the shadow of a large monument.

"Bet my blackin'-box I know more when I go away from here than I do now," he muttered, drawing a sheet from under his jacket. "I'll paralyze them body-snatchers, later, when I get their identity down fine. An' what a sensation there'll be! Phew! Thar'll be a revelation w'at'll make things hum, an' ef I ain't the hero of the hour, I don't want a cent. I'll be a reg'lar blood, an' on equal footin' wi' Blaine, Dr. Bliss, or old Rosky Conk."

And with bated breath, and gleaming eyes the youth waited. Soon five men, armed with picks and shovels, entered the cemetery and gathered around the new-made grave.

They were roughly dressed, with false beards, to a man, and masks over their faces.

The four men seemed to be under the captaincy of the fifth, who was a person of commanding stature.

A long-necked black bottle was passed around, and each man took a heavy drink, the captain being the last to imbibe, after which he said:

"Well, boys, here we are, and I reckon you all know what's to be done. Nobody to prevent, it becomes our duty to resurrect the man who lies here and test the truthfulness of the report that he had all his spare cash buried in his coffin with him. If he has done as he is said to have done, we must beg leave to take his gold from him, and also hand over his remains to the doctor's man, who will be here before long. So go to work, and I'll divide with you whatever wealth we may find in the old man's sepulcher."

The men accordingly did set to work with a will, and the filling of the grave was rapidly thrown out.

Billy watched the proceedings as best he could from behind the monument, without attracting attention.

"I reckon they'd skin me alive ef I was ter give 'em a chance," he muttered. "I s'pect this ain't all o' the party."

And he was right.

In the course of ten minutes a stout horse, attached to a covered undertaker's wagon, halted at the open gate of the cemetery, and the driver yelled out:

"Shure, have yez any passengers, for me? It's divil a minute I loikes to wait at this station."

"No; we've not got the body up yet," the captain answered back, gruffly. "Ye needn't get skeert; it won't hurt you."

"Faith, an' it's meself as knows that, or a divil a wan o' me would ye see here. It's a smart few of tha subjects I've kerried, in me time."

The digging continued, and shortly after the coffin was uncovered and rehoisted to the surface.

"This is a bold piece of business, boys, so be

careful, and be prepared to fight or run for your lives in case of discovery," the captain admonished, as they began unscrewing the lid.

"Humph! an' I'll bet the ould country mud on O'Callahan's boots, thet thar'd be a disclosure, ef *you* was tew be unmasked," Billy muttered.

It took but a short space of time to tear off the lid, and there within the coffin was a shriveled-up old man's body, lying in the glaring rays of moonlight.

He had not been dead long, as was evidenced by the fact that decomposition had not yet set in. That he had, when in life, been an avaricious man, seemed expressed by the lines of his hard features.

"The old chap looks as if he hated to give up his grip on life!" the captain said, with a laugh. "Just examine the shell, and if you don't find any rhino, we'll turn him over to our friend from Cork."

A close inspection failed to substantiate the report that the miser's gold had been buried with him. No gold, notes, or valuables whatever were to be found, and the ghouls gave a groan of disappointment.

By this Billy knew the result, and hastily arranging the sheet around the nearest headstone, and capping it with an old hat which he had brought along for the purpose, he crept stealthily away from the spot, over to where Lyle was crouching.

"'Sh!" he said, in an undertone. "I'm off on bizness. You can find the boat, after the ghouls are gone, an' paddle back to Phila. I'll see ye at headquarters early in the mornin'."

Then, without further explanation, he hurried away, and was soon beyond the walls of the lonely cemetery.

Making a rapid *detour*, via a neighboring swamp, he struck the highway over which he knew the Irishman must pass, and here secreted himself in a fence corner.

Pretty soon he heard a horse's tread, together with a voice singing; then the Irishman and his rig came into view, and Billy crouched back still further out of sight.

"Shure, swate Biddy Magee,
It's meself as loves thee,
Beca'se ye'r' so swate an' so frisky;
Ould Erin, machree,
Is tha place for the tea
That the bould Yankee lads they call
whisky,"

lung Dennis, as he drew rein near Billy's hiding-place and produced a bottle.

"Arrah! thare's nary a wan like whisky to cheer up the loikes," he added, as he took a long pull.

And while he was "pulling" at the bottle, Billy was not snoozing.

He glided from his concealment and reached the rear end of the hearse, whose high screened him from view.

As soon as the Irishman got his conveyance again under way, Billy unbuttoned and opened the doors in the rear, and carefully crawled into the vehicle beside the coffin, and let his legs dangle out behind.

"Ef this ain't an adventure, I don't want a sandwich," he mused, reflectively. "Et's w'at

reg'lars w'u'd eall desprit, an' mebbe that's about the size of it; but I hope I may never masticate another eyester, ef I don't venture it! If I get layed out, thar ain't no one but Fanny an' a few sech fellers as Rosky Conk an' Blaine as'll miss me. Ef the game works ter suit my peculiar ideas, durn me ef thar won't be an explosion."

Waiting until Dennis had stirred the horse into a brisk trot, and the jolting wagon was making a great noise, the daring bootblack set to work, to further his proposed plan. Slipping off the lid of the coffin, which had not been fastened on, he slowly drew the miser's little body out of his intended last resting-place, and dropped it out upon the road.

It was a ghastly and perhaps inhuman act, but necessary to further his well-laid plans.

Placing himself in the coffin, he succeeded in drawing the lid partly over him, and in such a position that he could entirely replace it, when it became necessary.

And, thus ensconced, he waited for the result, which he reasonably knew must come, as soon as he reached the destination—a place where the city's dead are dissected, boiled up, and their bones strung on wires for the curiosity of experimenting physicians and their irreverent scholars.

CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE FOR DABOL.

SOON the rattle of the wheels over pavement warned Billy that they were entering the metropolis.

Click! click! click! went the horse's feet over the pavement, while the wheels made less noise after they struck into the street car-track.

It seemed fully an hour, after they entered the suburbs, ere the wagon turned out of the track, and directly after came to a halt.

Immediately, there was a creaking sound as of the shutting of a heavy sliding door, and Billy concluded that they were in a stable. Next came the sound of a voice.

"Well, what success, Dennis?"

"Shure, it's excellent success, docther, an' I've the old gent's cadaver as snug as a bug in a rug, if not snugger."

"Good. For safety's sake, let's remove the coffin up to the closet, before you unhitch; then you can go and drink your fill at the expense of Doctor Dabol."

The two men approached the hind end of the conveyance, opened the doors, and, lifting out the coffin, bore it up a flight of steps, then along a hall, then up more steps, after which Billy concluded he was taken into a room, and deposited upon a table.

"You can go now," the doctor said to the Irishman, and Dennis was not loth to obey.

After he was gone, Dr. Dabol, who was a tall, dark-complexioned man, with dark hair and eyes, and a heavy mustache, and long, pointed goatee, laid his hand upon the loose coffin-lid, to obtain a view of his "subject," when, suddenly, the lid flew off, and half-way across the room, and there sat Billy, a pair of pistols in his grasp, ready for use!

"The devil!" broke from Dabol's lips as he

recoiled a few paces, his face of an ashen hue. "What does—"

"It means that I've jumped yer racket," Billy replied, with a grin of triumph. "I smelt a mice, and, what's better, smelt out its nest. Howdy do, Dr. Dabol? How do I luk fer a cadaver? Think ye could dissect me?"

"Ten thousand furies!" the medical ghoul gasped. "Who are you?"

"Ther right Honorable William the Snoozer, S. O. B. S.—snatcher o' body-snatchers—at yer service—so known from Delaware ter Skookil, an' frum nor' to south Phila. Ye see, I'm ostensibly an urchin who polishes up stogas at a nickel a rip, while in reality I'm ginerally snoozin' an' dreamin' out sech little picnics like this, fer instance. Then, I do take a hand at polyticks once in a while, when sech men as Blaine, or Rosky Conklin engage my services. So ye see I'm what is known in ther dictionary as a Jack of All Trades. Anyhow, I'm Jack o' yourn at present. What's yer opine?"

The doctor surveyed the bootblack with an expression of combined admiration and apprehension.

"Well, sir, you seem to have pried into something that is emphatically none of your business. What next do you think of doing?"

"Nixy! ye can't tap me an' draw out my plans fer a cent. I ain't afeard to tell ye that I ain't a-goin' ter do anything till I mature my materialization—thet is ter say, cabbage my coves. Ef ye lay quiet, an' don't go ter workin' yerself up inter a passion, like as not no one will be the wiser fer this. I may want ter utilize ye myself, bum-by. Ef ye'll show me ter yer exit, now, I'll adjourn."

The man of medicine paced to and fro a moment, the light of a tiger in his eyes; then motioning Billy to follow him, he led the way down-stairs to the street, where the Bootblack Sleuth bade him a mocking adieu.

Fairmount Park has often been aptly called "Lover's Eden," and bears the title well, for certain it is that there many hearts beat as one.

It was by merest chance that on the day following the cemetery adventure, Lyle Davis wandered out into the great Park, when he came unexpectedly upon Bertie, his adopted sister.

She was seated upon a bench under a great maple, overlooking the river, engaged in reading, while several of her young lady friends were playing at croquet, not far away.

In confusion at the unexpected encounter, Lyle was about to pass on without speaking when she sprung up and caught his arm.

"Why, Lyle, you sad—sad truant!" she exclaimed, as she drew him to the seat. "I've just been aching to catea you, and give you a good talking to. Oh! you awful fellow!"

"Well?" Lyle interrogated, seeing that he must face it out: "why am I so awful?"

"Because you have been drinking and carousing—because you haven't been home, in ever so long."

"You should not hold me responsible; you refused me, to accept a rascal, and my father also dispensed with family ties, in order to welcome

the rascal into my shoes. Is it any wonder I prefer death?"

"You should not malign your cousin, Lyle. Mr. Sedley is at least a gentleman."

"I am aware that he is your accepted lover, but I repeat that he is a rascal—a consummate villain, and I do not care to know any one who takes pleasure in his company."

Then, with a haughty bow, the outcast son arose and strode away, leaving behind him lying faint and helpless upon the seat, the one who had turned the whole course of his life. She had fainted.

The afternoon succeeding the encounter with the Gypsy girl, saw Mr. Davis take to his bed, unable longer to keep up under the depressing feelings that were settling over him.

And when Bertie returned from her day-of-it in the Park—a cloudy day, too, it had been, after her interview with Lyle—she found her adopted father with a high fever.

"I don't know what is the matter with me, more than that I am sick," he replied, in answer to her anxious inquiries. "I was told that I would be sick, but didn't credit it, until I found myself unable to keep up. Where is Jack?"

"He has not come in, yet, from down-town. Shall I send for a doctor?"

"Maybe you had better. I don't know hardly what to make of this sudden attack, for I have been in prime health, lately. Send John, the coachman, for Doctor Dabol."

"Oh! papa, not him! I fear Doctor Dabol, because he is so dark and wicked-looking."

"Pshaw! what a whim! I know the doctor to be an expert medical man, who has long been my family physician."

"I cannot help disliking him, but of course you are to be the chooser," Bertie answered hesitatingly.

Doctor Dabol was accordingly sent for, and came, and of course saw Mr. Davis, and manifested a great deal of regret to find him confined to his bed.

And after administering some remedies, he took leave, promising to call again within a few hours.

Bertie made bold to stop him in the hall as he was leaving.

"You will excuse me, sir, but I want to know what is the matter of papa?"

Dabol eyed her a moment, critically—then took off his hat, and rubbed the bald spot on the top of his head.

"Well, I don't fancy you'd know what was the matter, if I were to explain," he said.

"Your adopted parent is quite sick, but will likely recover."

Then he bowed himself out, leaving Bertie none the wiser than she was before.

"Oh! you ruffian!" Bertie breathed, after he had gone. "There is no crime too bad for you to be guilty of, I fear. I wish Jack was here."

And when Jack came she told him the news, and added:

"Jack, I don't half like that Doctor Dabol. I believe he is a bold, unscrupulous man, and if I am not wrong, he will do your uncle more harm than good."

"Ha! what an idea! Why, Dabol is one of our most expert physicians. He is a personal friend of mine, and I am ashamed to hear you speak so of him!"

And so Bertie said no more, but none the less her own opinion was unchanged.

Several days passed, but, instead of improving, Mr. Davis grew perceptibly worse. He was fast wasting in strength.

Dabol attended him closely, and appeared to be doing all in his power, but it was plainly unavailing.

"You are satisfied that my recovery is impossible, are you not?" the patient asked, one evening when he was very weak and feeble.

"Although I have done all in my power for you," was the reply, "the case looks very doubtful."

"I do not think you understand what is the matter of poor papa?" Bertie spoke up, independently. "I want a council of doctors."

"That is not to be thought of, my dear," Sedley spoke up, quickly. "Uncle is too feeble to withstand the excitement of a meeting and examination; it could not benefit him, and would probably shorten his days. Do you not think so, Dr. Dabol?"

"I do. Still, if Mr. Davis prefers, I have no personal objections, further than that I detest the plan of experimenting with life when life itself is hanging in the balance."

This shot had the desired effect. Mr. Davis nodded his head negatively.

"If there would be danger, I would not wish such a thing," he said, in a faint tone. "If God wills it that I shall die now, let it so be."

As night crept on, his mind seemed to wander, and once or twice he called for "Zella."

But no one understood whom he had reference to; consequently his calling was unanswered.

Dabol took leave about ten o'clock, and in passing through the hall encountered Sedley.

"Well?" the heir-prospective said, interrogatively.

"The end is drawing near. I do not think morning will find him alive. By all means see that no other physicians are called in."

"I shall see that no one is admitted!" Sedley answered, with a significant look.

Dabol had scarcely gone, when Bertie came down stairs.

"Oh! Jack," she said, tearfully, "he is calling so piteously for Lyle. Can you not, to please me, send for him?"

"To please you, yes, darling Bertie," he said, folding her in his arms and kissing her. "Run up-stairs now, and care for uncle, and I will send at once for Lyle to come, providing he is in a condition fit to see his father."

"Oh! thank you, Jack—your goodness shall have its reward," she said, and returned to the sick-room.

When she had gone, Jack Sedley's face became illuminated with a diabolical smile.

"Ha! ha! I fancy I see myself sending for the death-warrant to my fair prospects," he said, with a chuckle. "If Lyle Davis knew the state of affairs, he would not need to be sent for, and, what's more, he is too infernally sober of late to suit my plans. If Lyle were to see the old

gent just now, he—well, the deuce only knows what might be to pay."

And as the fates would have it, the door-bell rung just then, giving the schemer a violent start.

"The deuce!" he muttered, and went and partly opened the door.

Then he suppressed an oath.

Lyle Davis, looking neither shabby or dissipated, stood upon the steps, a light of resolution in his eyes.

And Sedley saw it!

CHAPTER VII.

SHUT OUT.

YES, Jack Sedley saw it, and he knew that though in the presence of his own cousin, he was equally in the presence of his most hated enemy.

Young Davis was perfectly composed, and bowed, in the most indifferent manner.

"I heard my father was sick, to-day, and have called to see him," he said. "Have the kindness to show me up to his room."

"I am afraid I shall have to refuse you that," Sedley replied, with a smile. "Your father has given positive orders that you shall not be admitted to his house, while he lives. Therefore, I am, you see, placed under the painful necessity of refusing you admission. I will tell you, however, that your father cannot live long, and if you choose to leave your address, I will see that you are notified, before the funeral."

"Your extreme kindness nearly overwhelms me," Lyle replied, with biting sarcasm. "Did I believe my father half as bad off as you intimate, I'd break every bone in your vile body but what I would see him. As it is, I think I comprehend the prime motive of your pretty little story. You are afraid of your own interests prospective, should I meet father or Bertie. But you needn't fear—you needn't fear."

Then he turned and went away.

Mr. Davis did not die that night as Dr. Dabol had as good as promised, and the doctor looked his surprise when he came in the morning, and found the ex-merchant bolstered up on some pillows.

But if disagreeably surprised, he was careful not to betray the fact, for Bertie's shrewd, searching eyes were ever upon him, and then, a new attendant had been introduced to the sick-room—a *petite* lady, with green goggles before her eyes, and her hair combed plainly back, and attire that was plain and neat.

Early in the night the family nurse and housekeeper, Mrs. Toole, had been called down to the kitchen, and on returning had brought the lady of the goggles as a temporary substitute, saying that she had been called to her mother's bedside and must go.

And so Miss Laura McFee had taken her place, and during the remainder of the night proved herself a very apt nurse.

She had taken much off from Bertie's shoulders, and had specially requested that she be al-

lowed to administer the remedies to Mr. Davis, and she was so permitted to do.

As a result Mr. Davis was materially improved in the morning, and yet neither Bertie nor the patient assigned the reason thereof to Miss McFee's skill.

"Temporarily you are better," Dabol said, after feeling of the patient's pulse. "But I would not advise you to place any hope in the fact, because as soon as the fever arises, I anticipate a loss of the little strength you have gained. Still, I will try in the utmost to preserve that strength."

So he left another batch of medicine, and said he would call again after his morning ride.

Sedley, who was devoted in his attention to the front door, met him as usual in the hall.

"Well, I see you failed," he said, with a frown. "You are not a good prophet."

"I cannot answer you here," the physician replied, in an undertone, "for even the walls have ears, oftentimes. Let me warn you, however—see that the new nurse is discharged!"

Mr. Davis held his own during the forenoon, but began to sink again, rapidly, as the latter half of the day crept on. An ashen pallor crept over his face again, and his pulse ran up far beyond the nineties.

Shortly after dinner, Bertie came down stairs, dressed for the street, and this seemed to cause Sedley much uneasiness.

"If it is not too much impertinence on my part, where are you going?" he asked, as blandly as the state of his temper would allow.

"I am going for some liquor for the sick," Bertie replied, with evident surprise at the question.

"You had better not leave. You'd better stay and watch that woman up-stairs. If liquor is needed, I'll get it," he said.

"Why, what do you mean, Jack?"

"I mean what my words would imply—I mean that I believe the woman up-stairs is a viper, an instrument of the league who of late has been worrying uncle with silent threats or warnings; I believe, moreover, that she has been sent here to put an end to his life."

"Oh! Jack! it is wicked to think of such a thing. You are surely wrong."

"I may be, but there are ten chances that I am not. At any rate, it will do no harm to watch her very closely, for you know an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

"Well, then, if you will get the liquor, I will do as you say," Bertie said, turning reluctantly and retracing her steps up-stairs.

"Saved!" Sedley breathed when she had gone. "If she had got out on the street, she would have hunted the city over but what she would have found Lyle. Curse me, but things are getting devilishly interesting. That was a happy idea on the new nurse, and may possibly be worked further. By the way, who in thunder is the woman? She's disguised, that is evident—she has also probably been tampering with the medicines judging by what Dabol said. If so, she smells a rat, and is an enemy to us. Egad! the first opportunity I get, I'll pull the goggles from her nose, and see if I know her."

What was the secret? Was Miss McFee an angel of mercy, or was she an emissary of fore-planned vengeance? _____

After being refused the privilege of seeing his father, Lyle Davis walked back toward the center of the city, buried in deep thought.

At the corner of Sixth and Arch streets, he encountered Billy, who had just finished a shine, and was casting around for another job.

"Well?" he interrogated, "what luck, pard?"

"I was refused admittance," Lyle replied.

"Pshaw! ye don't say! Who refused ye?"

"Jack Sedley."

"That so? I tell ye thar's bad bizness a-goin' on in that house, an' don't ye ferget it. They're layin' the guv'nor out, or my name ain't William the Snoozist, that's all. Did they say the old gent was bad?"

"Sedley was kind enough to say to me that as soon as father was dead, he'd inform me in time for the funeral."

"Cheeky, by blackin'! But, jest hold yer mules, an' I'll go scoutin', I will. I presume I orter see the guv'nor, inderwidually, an' so ye jest hie yerself ter ther roost, an' I'll report, as soon as there aire any dewelopments. I'll invetigate the biz frum Alphabet ter Omega, or ye can call me Billy the Flunk."

Accordingly he tucked his box under his arm, and trudged away up Sixth street.

He had not gone far when he saw a fancy barouche, drawn by a span of high-stepping horses, coming down the street, and in it saw no less a person than Dr. Dabol.

At sight of him a peculiar gleam shot into the bootblack's eyes, and he involuntarily stepped to the curb.

"Phew! the old pilgarlic is tuckin' on lots of Saratoga," he muttered. "I wonder ef he'll reckernise his friends in ther street."

Waiting till he caught the doctor's eye, he raised his hand and motioned for him to stop.

It would seem the hight of all that is ridiculous, but Billy was well aware that he had a "hold" upon the man of medicine that would be recognized.

Dabol at first seemed inclined to let his coachman drive on, and pay no attention to the urchin, but on second thought, he ordered the carriage to halt beside the curb.

"I thor't ye know'd better'n to shin by yer poor relations, 'thout stoppin'," he said, with a grin. "Fear o' consequences aire a powerful motive, eh? Ef ye hadn't stopped then, I should hev 'piped' on ye, sure's John Rogers!"

Dabol flushed, and shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded.

"A good deal," the young Sleuth said, promptly. "First of all, I want ye to let up; ef ye don't, by blackin', I'll make it perspirations fer ye, an' don't ye ferget it!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! you know. You're 'tendin' Mr. Davis. It will be to your interest that you see that he lives."

"Certainly. He has every prospect of recovery."

"Bah! I don't reckon yer word's wu'th much. Jest bet yer life, tho', thet it won't be healthy

fer ye ter let ther guv'nor ante off—that's all. By-by!"

And he trudged on again, while Dabol ordered his coachman to drive home.

"That young devil must be suppressed!" he muttered, with a dark frown. "He already knows too much, and if left at large, he'll make bad work—bad work!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

BENT on seeing Bertie, or in some way gaining such information as he required, Billy made his way to the Davis residence, and boldly rung the bell.

A servant answered the summons—Jack had been obliged to relinquish his guard long enough to go after some liquor.

The woman who answered the summons was the eccentric woman-nurse, Miss McFee, who wore green goggles.

The Boy Sleuth gazed at her a minute, as if dumfounded with astonishment.

"Fan—" he partly ejaculated, but the nurse's fair white hand raised deprecatingly; he knew the move and recognized it—knew that she was not desirous of being questioned.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Can I see ther guv'nor?"

"No, sir. He is very ill, and cannot be seen."

"Phew! that so? S'pect I can see his darter, Bertie, then?"

"I don't know; I will see," the nurse replied, shutting the door and leaving Billy on the steps.

"That's sure indercation o' beef—Fan Flint's presence here is indercation thet she's either workin' up my game, or something else. Fer that is Fan Flint, tho' she wants the fact kept mum. She's allus been keen an' white fer me, an' so I'll give her rope and say nix. I'd like to see the gal, Bertie, tho', which reminds me thet ther nurse didn't take in my wisitin'-card; but I s'pect it'll be all the same."

A few minutes later Bertie opened the door in person, and Billy made a most gallant bow.

"Scuse me," he said, "but you've probably heard of me through Mr. Davis. I am Billy the Snoozer."

"Oh, are you? I have heard of you. What will you have?"

"Well, ye see, I wanter perfeshionally interview you—thet is to say, I hev got sumthin' to say, what I reckon will tickle you. So ef ye'll take me inter ther sofa-furnished, peanner-provided parlor, I'm yer huckleberry."

"If you have anything important to say, very well—I will listen to you; if you have not, please be brief, as my attention is demanded at father's bedside," Bertie said, leading the way into the grand parlor, simply to gratify the boy's whim.

Here Billy became seated, and first, before speaking, took a critical survey of his surroundings.

"S'pect 'twould take considerable number of bootblack's stray ducats to tog up such a place as this, eh?" he soliloquized, with an appreciative wink. "By the way, miss, the guv'nor's bad, eh?"

"He is very ill."

"That's bad; an' mind you, he won't get well, ef Sedley an' Dabol hold their grip on him. Reckon, however, the little nurse wi' the goggles is getting in her work fine, and 'll puzzle 'em. Ef ye ain't achin' fer a hearse to stop before the door, jest freeze to the nuss—she knows her biz every time."

"What do you mean? You surely do not intimate that my affianced husband and this dark Doctor Dabol are working against papa?" Bertie interrogated in surprise, not unmixed with indignation.

"Well, I size it up about that way. Anyhow, I know thet Sedley's workin' his best slipper to get an established foothold in Lyle Davis's place, an' from a few things I know, I presume he wouldn't deluge the earth with tears ef the guv'nor were to pass in his deck, spades up."

"You talk strangely—insultingly."

"Nix—I don't neither. I know my diagram, and I know what I wish to warn you of—that Jack Sedley is a consummate villain, and if you know when your hard-tack is well buttered, you'll 'scoot' him, instanter, and take yer first flame, Lyle Davis."

"Between myself and Mr. Davis all is virtually at an end, and if you come here as a go-between, you've quite mistaken your vocation. I do not propose to ally myself to a drunkard, no matter how much I might respect him otherwise."

"Oh! well, I reckon that's all right, an' if I do say et, ye can give William the Snoozer credit, because I did one gud turn. Whar ye give young Davis a twister w'ot sit him a-goin' down hill, I lassoed onter him, an' as a result thar ain't a straighter disciple o' Teetote, whoever he may be, than Lyle Davis. All et wants is fer ye to go ter him, put yer arms around his chin, in reg'lar old Romeo an' Juliet style, an' give him a Mary Anderson kiss, like as ef ye war goin' to blow off his ear. Then tell him you're his'n and his'n's yours; go buy a set ter furniture, an' I'll bet things 'll go off like caster oil on troublesome waters."

"You are incorrigible, sir!"

"Yas, so I've been told before, but gift o' gab b'longs to my biz, an' he who can't quote frum Genesis, or exerceute a double song an' dance, hain't no biznees along my route. An' now, then, afore I go, I want ye ter promise me three things, an' when ye get spliced, I'll give ye a fu'st-class shine, free o' charge."

"I will promise—perhaps—after I know what are your demands."

"Well, in ther first place, I want ye ter call a quorum wi' yer own heart, an' decide to scoot Sedley."

"I will take that into consideration."

"Good! Next, I want ye ter promise not to discharge the new nurse, for she's workin' ag'in' big odds to baffle villainy."

"I will also consider that request."

"Better as good! Thirdly, watch the new nurse. If she does not destroy the medicine Dabol leaves, you do so yourself, for it is *deadly poison*!"

"Mercy! you do not mean this?"

"Privately, yes. I am as good as assured that that's what's the matter. I'll go now. You retain the p'int's I've given ye, till I see you

again. If the guv'nor gets alarmingly worse, send for me to the Dice-Cup—I reckon ther perlice knows whar it is."

After this interview with Bertie, Billy left the Davis mansion and wandered back into town.

Something unusual with him, he solicited no "shines" on the way, but appeared to be deeply absorbed in reverie, which was probably not pleasant, as it brought some serious frowns to his forehead.

"It ain't workin' right—et ain't, by blackin'!" he muttered, taking off his cap to scratch his head. "I ain't got hold of enuff matter to make a kersplurge yet, an' yet, if I don't do something to get some conclusive proof 'fore long, it will be too late. They're trottin' the gov'nor out o' the way as fast as possible, that's certain, and it won't take long to do it, unless Fan is workin' ag'in' 'em, which I shouldn't wonder. Guess I wouldn't a-got into the house, ef Sedley had been there."

He did not do much more street-work that day, but as soon as it was toward night, set out for the Dice-Cup, his mind plainly in a state of great activity.

What were his thoughts or plans, of course, nobody could well tell, but the strange expression of eye told that he had a deep scheme working upon his mind, and working hard, too.

When he arrived at the Dice-Cup, he found the bar-room filled, as usual, with the rough *habitués* of the place, and Mrs. McCarthy presiding behind the bar.

All eyes were turned upon the Bootblack Sleuth, as he entered, and he felt that trouble was ahead, when he heard a peculiar murmur go the rounds of the crowd.

"I'm in fer a racket, sure," was his conclusion, when he saw that the stairway leading to the floor above, was blockaded by two men, and they two of the most notorious "bad" men of the city, Sam the Soaker, and Ben the Bum—who were men noted for not hesitating at committing any crime, no matter of what nature or degree of hideousness, so long as it brought them pay.

"Hello! thar he is!" Sam the Soaker cried, surveying Billy, with a gloating expression. "That's the chap—*i. e.*, Bill the Snoozer."

"Yes, that's me, sure enough, old evaporator," Billy said, forcing a bold front. "What of it?"

"Oh! a darned pile," the Soaker answered. "We've been holdin' sort o' convention about you, to-day, an' come ter the conclusion that you are too flip!—too fine fer us. Et's known to the b'yees that you stand in solid wi' the perlice an' detectives, an' consequently, ye ain't squar' on us."

"I'm under no obligations to you, nor any of you. I pay my board here, and if you mind your business, I will mine."

"Oho! but ye see that won't go down. You're too smart, you aire. You know too much, an' all thar is of it, you've got to git out o' Phila, or ye're goin' ter git yer head bu'sted, afore ye leave hyar."

"Oh! I'm not afraid!" the young Sleuth retorted, taking another tack. "Don't you sup-

pose that if I was to come up missing or hurt, this ranch would get pulled for dead sure? Oh! yes! You're a bold lion, Sam—bold enough to attack a barrel of whisky, any day—but you kin be mighty certain that it wouldn't be a healthy job for you to tackle me."

The ruffian winced. He recognized the unmistakable logic in the statement; he knew that Billy the Snoozer did "stand in" with the police and detectives, and the Soaker had good reason for belief that any harm done to the lad, would make Philadelphia too hot for him.

"Mebbe you're right," he admitted, boldly; "but, never mind; I'm goin' ter git paid fer puttin' you in a state of quietus, an' I'll trap you, when you don't know it."

"Good idea, Sammy. When ye dursent tackle a wassup nest at daytime, ye can sometimes poke 'em with a pole, at night. Come around on Arch, ter-morrer, an' I'll polish 'em up fer ye, in gud shape."

And turning, he made his exit into the street.

"No place fer a snooze thar, ter-night—not fer me, anyhow," he muttered. "The doctor or Sedley has bin tew work, an' set Sammy the Soaker onter me. Hum! hum! little by little things begin to get clearer. By-me-by the sun will shine."

Mr. Davis did not improve as night drew on again; in fact, he grew alarmingly worse.

Bertie, who, since Billy's visit, had watched Miss McFee closely, and noted that to all appearances she was administering the remedies left by Dabol, finally grew desperate, and called her to one side.

"For God's sake, do not give father any more of the medicine!" she said. "I have been warned that it is deadly poison."

Miss McFee smiled.

"Billy told you," she said, more positively than interrogatively.

"Yes."

"He is right. The medicine is poison. That administered when I first came, was a slow poison, calculated evidently to take the life by degrees, so that suspicion would not be aroused. The last medicine left, had I administered it, would have killed Mr. Davis before morning. As it is, he is very bad, from the effects of what he swallowed before I came, and may drop away at any minute. He asked me his condition and prospects, a bit ago, and my answer was that I did not believe his recovery probable."

"What is to be done? Is this terrible crime to be permitted without resistance?"

"It is better not to interfere, at present. I am watching against further attack, and if there is a final change for the worse, then leave it to me to expose. I seek vengeance—I hold the proof to buy it with. Ah! I'll look out for the retributive part, right well!" she said, bitterly.

About midnight that night, Mr. Davis awoke from a restless sleep, with a violent start, and gasped for water. After he had slaked his thirst he seemed slightly better, and called for Miss McFee.

"I am going fast," he murmured, as she bent over him, "and I would like a minister, to per-

form a marriage ceremony, before it is too late. Can you send for one, dear?"

"I will go for one," was the reply, and bidding Bertie take her place, she hurried out of the house.

She was gone a long time—an hour or more, but finally returned, bringing with her a man wrapped in a long cloak, a clerical-looking party, with heavy hair, eyebrows and beard, while his eyes were shaded by a pair of goggles like those of Miss McFee.

As soon as they arrived, Mr. Davis sent for Sedley, and called him and Bertie to his bedside.

"Children," he said, in a faint voice, "I have about made up my mind that I shall not see another day here below, and before I go, I desire to see you two joined as husband and wife, and to that end have provided a minister. Therefore, if you are both of a mind on the matter, join hands, and the reverend gentleman will soon make you one."

Sedley took Bertie by the hand and led her forward. The clergyman then brought forth a book, and began to read the marriage service.

Not more than half-way through it had he got, when a door was flung open, and there stepped into the room Miss McFee, who had a moment before absented herself—not Miss McFee now, but the girl sharp!

"Stop!" she said, peremptorily. "This nonsense has gone far enough. This marriage cannot legally be performed, for to my positive knowledge, Jack Sedley has another wife living, from whom he has no divorce."

CHAPTER IX.

SHOWING UP SEDLEY.

HAD a thunderbolt fallen in the room at the bedside of the sick man, it could not have created much more excitement than did the declaration of Fanchon Flint.

Sedley uttered an oath, and leaped back a few paces, while Bertie separated from him, and shrunk toward the side of Mr. Davis, who sat bolstered up in bed, white and almost speechless.

"This is an outrage—a damnable plot to ruin me, instigated by my jealous cousin," Sedley cried, as soon as he had so far recovered as to be able to speak.

"No, it is not—it's true as preachin'!" Fanny retorted, independently. "You are a married man, though it is not your fault that your wife is not dead long ago."

"If married, as you say, who is this man's wife?" Mr. Davis asked, feebly.

"Her real name was Diana Flint before this rascal entrapped her; finding married life an incumbrance, about a year ago he came to this city, and placed her in one of the many private asylums here for safe-keeping, claiming, I suppose, that she was unsound in mind. Learning that they were not living together, I applied myself assiduously to the task of finding her, and it was only recently that I learned of her escape from the asylum, and joining of a branch of our own Gypsy family as their queen."

"Zella! you do not mean Zella?" Mr. Davis ejaculated, eagerly.

"Yes, I believe that is the name she has

adopted. She is the wife of this rascal, Jack Sedley."

"Rascal, woman? How dare you?"

"All for the simple reason that I dare, sir would-be bigamist! Further than that, I accuse you of complicity with the wretch, Dr. Dabol, in administering to Mr. Davis deadly poisons with a view of killing. I have nearly all the medicine, which, when analyzed, will be conclusive enough testimony of your awful guilt. As the matter is not mine, I will leave it to Mr. Davis to say whether you shall be jailed or not, as sometimes in these family affairs matters can often be more amicably arranged than to give the courts a voice.

"If a perlice detective is needed, however, one's ready fur biz," the minister said, crossing himself, and then, as quick as a flash, he threw off the cloak and false beard, and stood unmasked before them—Billy the Snoozer!

Sedley uttered another oath at this revelation.

"Thort Samuel the Scaker had me, didn't you?" Billy chuckled, putting his thumb up to the end of his nose. "Thort I was a lost comet, hey?—but I ain't! You're in a powerful bad fix."

"I do not propose to put this matter before the courts," Mr. Davis said, with sadness. "I have for some time past suspected foul play, and I am not surprised to hear that Jack is mixed up in it. I am not revengeful—yonder is the door, Jack: take advantage of the opportunity I offer you—go, and never let me see your face again, or that of your associate in crime, Dabol."

"But, dear uncle, pause! Consider. I cannot take such a cast-off even from you, without an explanation. Let me tell you all; if I am not exonerated I will go, but I have no fear but what I can clear myself in your eyes and Bertie's. Shall I explain?"

"We will hear you, but your case is hopeless," said Mr. Davis, with remarkable decision.

"Not so, unless you are very unjust. To begin with, I am, I suppose, legally married, but that is all. I was misled into a marriage with this woman's sister, and once the fatal step was taken, I found that my wife and her sister belonged to a band of low, thieving Gypsies. I fancy you can realize something what my horror was when I made this discovery, but I could have cheerfully borne up under the blow, had I not learned that my wife was a gambler, and none too choice of the company she kept.

"I tolerated this sort of business until it became unbearable, when I attempted to reprimand her and she turned on me, and I narrowly escaped being cut to pieces. She was, of course, arrested, and at the examination pronounced insane, and I was given the privilege of providing for her, rather than have her sent to the general lunatic asylum which the law provided.

"Knowing that my life would not be worth whistling for if I did not take care of her, I put her in a private institution, and there she remained until a short time since, when I learned of her escape.

"This woman here, Fanchon Flint, has made several vain attempts to blackmail me for the

purpose of extorting money, and this last attack is but another attempt at her sworn revenge. As to the poison, if she has any, I'll stake my honor Dabol did not leave it; it is another job she has put up to ruin me!"

Fanchon Flint did not give vent to words, immediately, but stood regarding Sedley with a sarcastic smile upon her face.

"Bravo!" she said, finally. "You have made a defense by far better than I deemed you capable of doing. Still, it lacks the requisite essential of truthfulness. That is all I have to say. If Mr. Davis has any doubt about my side of the story, I can produce my sister, prove the marriage, her sanity, and numerous other little and big acts of villainy that will not improve your record. And it may not be long before we can see you up before his 'Honor,' charged with—"

"Stop!" he cried, fiercely—then seizing his hat, he rushed from the room, and from the house.

When he was gone, Fanchon Flint turned to Mr. Davis and Bertie:

"I am sorry justice required me to make this disturbance, and I trust you will both pardon me," she said. "Come, Billy, let us go."

And they did go, leaving the ex-merchant and his adopted daughter to their reflections.

A week passed on.

August was drawing to a close, and matters at the Davis home remained literally unchanged except that Mr. Davis was better, and able to be out about the grounds.

Fanchon Flint and her sister had wholly disappeared—even Billy the Snoozer had lost track of them. Sometimes it occurred to the busy bootblack that they had been victims of foul play, but as he kept well posted on the movements of Dabol and Sedley, he could not believe that they had been up to any such work, for they were keeping very shady, as were the roughs around the Dice-Cup.

And Billy was not idle.

He applied himself energetically to "pushing," his trade during the daytime, and slept very sparingly during the night, putting in the most of his time in dodging about here and there and seeing and hearing what he could.

One dark rainy night he saw Dabol leave his house and hurry down the street. There was nothing strange in this, as he might be going somewhere on a professional visit, only that he paused just outside his mansion and peered about, evidently to ascertain if he was watched; and then, too, it was past eleven o'clock.

Billy had been "shadowing" the house when Dabol emerged from his mansion and betook himself down the street.

"Something wrong," the young dodger muttered, scratching his head. "Thet warn't no honest look he tuk just then; 'peared like he was expectin' somebody would nab him. He's a bad one, that pill-peddler, an' if I mistake not, he'll die by some o' his own medicine one o' these days."

After a bit of reflection and a glance at the threatening sky, Billy made up his mind to pursue at a respectful distance and see whither the doctor went.

CHAPTER X.

"DRAPPED."

AFTER more than an hour's walk, Dr. Dabol arrived at a grim-looking brick house on Bainbridge street, and rung the door-bell.

Though the windows were closely guarded by white wooden shutters, that did not signify that the house was tenantless, for the door was partly opened directly, and the doctor scurried inside, after which the door was shut.

"That means fer me to stay out," Billy remarked, as he paused in the shadow of a tree on the opposite side of the street. "I'm left out in the cold, sure's preachin', ef I ain't sharp enough to get an ear glued onto ther racket inside over yonder. Humph! I s'pect old Pills thinks he's all hunk, and as snug as a bug in a rug. But he ain't."

This did not seem to be a matter of particular moment to the young Sleuth, for, crossing the street, he glided up a narrow brick alley and reached the yard in the rear of the house that Dabol had entered.

It was rather a court than a yard, being lined on all sides by dwellings, which were occupied by the poorest of the city's poor.

It was a gloomy place, and dark and ill-smelling, but Billy cared not for this. His sole object at present was to learn what Dabol was up to.

Stealing stealthily into the court, he paused and gazed around. All was as silent as the tomb. His attention was of course fastened upon the house in which the doctor had taken refuge. It was a three-story dwelling, and to provide against fires an iron ladder ran up the side of the building, alongside the several windows—or rather, beginning at the roof ran downward until within ten feet of the ground, where it suddenly ended just out of reach of any one below.

In the third story back window of the block, a light shone dimly, and Billy's eyes took in this fact at the same moment that he was contemplating the fire escape.

"Reckon like enuff that's where I'll find the doctor, or else that's put thar fur a signal o' sum kind," he thought. "Ef I was to climb up thar, an' git a bucket o' scaldin' water dumped on my head, I guess I'd know better, next time. Well, anyhow, I'd have to 'knowl-edge that I tuk water."

He did not take long to decide on a point, and was equally rapid in forming a determination.

Procuring a box he placed it against the side of the house, mounted it, and was thereby enabled to reach the lower round of the fire ladder.

To draw himself up to footing, was but the work of a moment, and then it was an easy matter for him to climb upward.

By this time the misty rain had increased to a driving storm, and the thunder crashed angrily in accompaniment to the lightning's spiteful flashes.

"Oh! but won't I get soaked, tho'!" Billy reflected, as the water began to penetrate his garments, and ran down his back. "Must be sum sech night as this that Vennor gits up on the roofs an' mannyfacters probs. Probably I'll get probs, or probed, afore I get through with this experiment."

Hand over hand, he pulled himself upward, pausing long enough at each window to peer in. The rooms on both the lower floors, however, were empty, and dark, and nothing of interest to him was visible.

At last, drenched to the skin, he reached the side of the window from which the light shone out into the wild night, and craned his head forward to make observations.

The light came from a small lantern, which sat on the window sill.

As it had first occurred to the young Sleuth, it was evidently placed there as a signal for some one, as the room in which it was positioned was vacant and unfurnished.

For a moment after this discovery the young Sleuth was somewhat in doubt just how to act, for he had no assurance but what it might be a trap arranged for the accommodation of burglars, he having heard of such things in the course of his experience.

Therefore he clung to the ladder and watched the interior of the room in silent reflection until a chilly feeling began to steal over him, and he realized that it was high time to be doing something.

He had about concluded to make an attempt to enter the room, when he felt the ladder jar, and glancing downward, he made the horrifying discovery that some one was ascending the ladder, a man, evidently, but almost indistinguishable, owing to the darkness.

Here was a fix, indeed.

Discovery was inevitable, but something must be done, and that quickly.

If the man below had yet discovered Billy, he had given no warning of the fact, and this gave the young dodger hopes that after all he might escape into the building undiscovered. So he reached forward and tried the window, when, to his satisfaction, it rolled rapidly upward on pulleys.

The same instant a strong gust of wind dashed out the light, leaving all in total darkness.

Taking advantage of the respite, Billy swung himself around from the ladder into the window and in an instant later was into the room.

"So far, so good," was his reflection. "If the perlice was to nab me now, his Honor would say, 'William, you're entitled to a few in Moya.' Ugh! jails an' me never did agree. Reckon I'd better shet out the other chap, or he'll get up a row about nothin'."

Acting accordingly, he softly pulled down the sash.

It took but a moment for him to spring the catch and fasten it—then he stood to one side in the darkness and waited.

The other chap soon reached the window and tried to raise it, but unavailingly.

The window remained firmly down, and his attempts to raise it were fruitless. Finally he uttered an oath, and dashed in one of the panes, after which he easily reached in and undid the fastenings, and the window glided upward.

"Thar! euss my boots ef I didn't git in, after all!" he grunted, as he shook himself like some great animal, to dislodge the water. "Wonder which o' the boys put up the job on me? Not a very smart trick, whoever it was."

Billy breathed freer, as he heard this, for it

was possible that there was a chance for him yet.

And so it proved.

The man, who was heavily bewhiskered and attired in an oilcloth coat, soon passed on into an adjoining apartment or hall and closed the door after him.

"Dunno if I twig his nibs or no, the boot-black soliloquized. "Luks like a reg'lar pirate frum the high seas—or else he's a schooner un-loader at the occasional saloon around the corner."

Waiting fully ten minutes where he was, and hearing nothing, Billy then stole forward to the door and applied first his eye, and then his ear to the keyhole.

Beyond the door was a long, uncarpeted hall, on either side of which rooms opened off, and the hall was illuminated by but a single gas jet.

On listening he could not hear a suspicious sound, and accordingly believing that all was safe, he opened the door and stepped forward into the hall.

The same instant, almost, he was seized in the powerful grasp of several pairs of hands; a bag-like gown was thrown over his head, and he was marched forward, into some other room, where, after he was securely bound, hand and foot, he was placed upon a chair.

There was then a scattering of feet, after which all became momentarily silent, and Billy felt that something was surely about to happen.

The silence continued for several minutes—then the bag-like cap was suddenly jerked from his head and he got a fair view of his surroundings.

He was sitting at one side of a room which was furnished only with a number of common arm-chairs, and the chandelier which hung from the ceiling.

In a horse-shoe circle facing Billy, sat two dozen, at least, of human beings wrapt in gowns of pure white, and wearing over their heads and faces duplicates of the black bag Billy had been provided with, only that theirs were furnished with eye and mouth apertures.

A grim-looking lot they were, and just over their heads, suspended from the chandelier, was a board containing the mystic letters that Billy had seen upon Mr. Davis's card:

A grunt of disapproval went up among the weird band, as Billy's face was exposed plainly to their view.

The middle man of the circle seemed to be the leader of the organization, for when, a moment later, he raised his hand, the other masqueraders did likewise.

Then they went through a series of pantomimic gesticulations that might have looked very ludicrous upon the stage, but which were anything but funny to the young Sleuth.

"Reckon they're gittin' ready fer bizness, o' some kind," he concluded; "an' judgin' by their gyrations, I'm booked for an all-fired pummelin'."

The maskers, however, did not seem to contemplate such a thing, for immediately after their pantomimic exercise, they paused and leveled the index finger of each hand accusingly at their prisoner, and there followed a very dismal sort of a hissing groan.

Billy was not scared in the least.

"Out of voice ter-night, ain't yer?" he said, with a grin. "Hain't got yer keyboard tuned up right fer choir singin'. Now, thar's Jim Blaffkins, down St. John's Court, who tunes up peanners an' accorjuns most blamed cheap, I've heerd tell."

Another grunt from the pantomimists proclaimed their poor appreciation of Billy's volunteered news. They made some gesticulations at one and another again, after which the captain advanced a few paces and said, pitching his voice in its deepest tone:

"Young man, are you aware of the nature of the beings you are sitting in the presence of?"

"Waal, I reckon!" the young dodger replied. "'Tain't often I get tuk in on suckers or gillies, like you're tryin' ter smother in them peecool-er night-caps."

"You are not prone to exercise wisdom," the captain said, "therefore you are *dead*!"

"Dead? Not by a long boot! I'm a stayer, I am."

"You are dead in a literal sense. You are of too great danger to us to be permitted to exist, so only two things remain for you—you must become a member of our secret organization, or you must die. Take your choice."

"That so? Got it all cooked and dried, have you?"

"Exactly."

"But, supposin' I give ye the slip, like Joner did the *genus whalus* of the antediluvian deep?"

"No danger of that. You would indeed be a shrewd youngster if you could get the start of an organization like ours. No, you young hound, there are positively only two chances for you—death or allegiance to us—allegiance bound by an oath, to break which will be worse than death."

"Reckon ye better book me for a hearse then, as I belong to a Sunday-skule, and I don't swear worth a cent. Besides, I don't reckon ye want me werry bad; I ain't the kind of a hairpin as makes up fer a heavy villain wuth a cent. An' I wouldn't be resposnerble. Ther first time I got a chance, I'd give ye away. Therefore, for the severiaeth time, as Rosky Conk would say at the State Convention, et behooves ye to drap me, like ye would a red-hot coal."

"Yes, we will drop you, and it will be where you won't get out again," the captain assured, grimly, and even as he spoke, the floor beneath Billy's chair was quickly jerked from beneath it, and both he and the chair went down through the opening thus made—down, down, down, into blank space!

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNWELCOME LETTER.

THE day following the events last narrated, Jack Sedley and Doctor Dabol drove up to the Davis mansion, accompanied by a dapper young man, who sported a few pale hairs on his upper lip, and looked as if a superabundance of food in his family was not a common luxury.

Mr. Davis, who had so far recovered from his recent illness as to be quite smart again, supported by Bertie, was taking a walk about the ground, as the three men entered.

As soon as he and Bertie saw them, they paused, and waited for them to approach, which they did, the snob in advance.

When a few paces off, they, too, came to a halt, and exchanged glances, after which the man of the pale mustache began:

"Mr. Davis—the *honorable* Mr. Davis, I believe, accompanied by his charming adopted daughter. Ah! yes, pardon my intrusion, sir, but, in behalf of my client, I must beg leave to present you with a little notice—hem! yes. A trifling affair, and can doubtless be amicably arranged."

With a cold searching glance at Sedley, whose face wore the quiet, malicious expression of a triumphing demon, Mr. Davis received a document which the dapper young man presented, and opened it.

His eyes were not long in running over enough of it, then his face grew ashen pale, and he staggered back a pace.

"I presume you understand," the dapper young man remarked, with a smirk, "and on the young lady's account I have been permitted to extend you a reprieve until to-morrow to think over matters in. Trusting by that time you will be prepared to make everything satisfactory, I remain yours truly, Jeffries Jenks, attorney at law. Good-day, sir, good-day!"

Then, doffing his hat to Bertie, he turned and gave his arms to Dabol and Sedley, who in turn doffed their hats, and the trio walked away.

Leaving Mr. Davis staring after them with wild eyes, his face still retaining the deathly color, his limbs trembling as in an ague spasm.

"My God! I never dreamed that this blow would be struck me," he groaned. "Help me to the house, dear!"

"Yes, father. Tell me, oh, please do—what is the matter?"

"You will know all too soon, dear," was the sad reply. "It will be a bitter blow to you, but you must bear it, as well as I, for you are young and strong."

"Yes, to be sure I am, and I am willing to stand anything for your sake. So please tell me what the trouble is?"

"Not now, child, not now; wait until I feel better, dear; then you will likely know all—perhaps sooner."

And so Bertie assisted him to the house and into the cosey library, where he seated himself in a great easy-chair and bade her see him an hour later.

When she had left the room, he covered his face with his hands and remained thus for several minutes in silence; then his form shook as with a shudder, and he once more opened the strange missive.

It was written on common white paper, in a cramped, irregular hand, while the spelling and grammatical arrangement indicated the writer's illiteracy.

The following were the contents:

"PHILADELPHY, Aug.—, 18—.

"MR. ALGERNON DAVIS, *Retired Bob-a* :—

"DEAR SIR:—By these fu tenderlines you'll hev arriv' at the conklusion that I ain't s'ark food, but ar' back in Ameriky, live an' blowin' like a porpus. I expect ye've bin calculatin' me dead but I ain't, consekently thar'll hev tew be a sum at smart change in our bizness relations, you bet. So let's cum ter

the p'int ter oncet. Years ago—sixteen, more or less—this hyar hulk tuk a noshun to visit ther sea as a sailor, an' have a jolly life on the wave. Bein' encumbered wi' two children an' a squar' half o' a half of a milyun dollars in U. S. money, an' not knowin' w'at ter do wi' sech encumbrances, I persuaded you, my schoolmate, ter take charge o' the gal an' the money till my return, an' tuk, in security therefor, a mortgage on yer property for a like sum. On course I reck'ed ye war honest, or I would not ha' trusted ye. The boy I put in ther almshouse, an' then I lit out onto the seas.

"A couple o' years later my vessel was reported wrecked off Cape Horn, but it was a mistake, an' while ye war probably mournin' over my sad demise I was takin' my reg'lar rations of grog aboard the Mary Jane. Frum ther high seas I drifted over inter Australia, an' hyar I am back again, arter the afore-said epochs of time, in ruther a used up condition, owin' tew a failure in the whisky supply in Melbourne, an' you bet I'm ready fer my two-fifty. As for my gal, I hev giv' her tew a nice young chap who has befriended me, an' has bin courtin' her. His name is Jack Sedley.

"Ef he makes a good son-in-law, p'r'aps I'll whack up wi' him. Anyhow, the gal might as well git on her Sunday duds, as Jack 'll be around, one o' these days to claim her.

"As fer the cash, ye can waltz around wi' it, to-day or to-morrer—as soon as ye please. Ef ye don't, why inter the market goes the mortgage, fer ter be foreclosed, because I've had the 'jims' bad, lately, an' my sea-legs ain't hardly straight geered enuff fer these heer city walks. Hopin' these fu streaks o' ink won't hurt ye much, I am

"Yures tew de'th,

"BILL BLOSSOM.

"Dice-Cup Boardin'-house."

Over and over did the ex-merchant read this, until it seemed as though he must have it by heart, his thoughts evidently not of a pleasant nature, judging by the pained expression of his kindly face.

"I did think he was dead, in truth," he muttered, "or I should have never set my heart so deeply on the interests of poor Bertie. But they shall not snatch her away from me so easily, and as for the money, I shall think twice, before surrendering it to this man, whom I do not know to be the one who is rightfully entitled to it. I do not believe that Bill Blossom is alive."

So drawing a writing-desk toward him, he produced some paper and a pencil, and wrote the following:

"PHILADELPHIA, Aug.—,

"MR. WILLIAM BLOSSOM, SIR:—

"Your epistle has been received and perused, and in reply I will say, that I shall have to exact strong proof as to your identity, before I can make any move, whatever, in the matter mentioned in yours. Until you can produce such satisfactory proof, I must decline to recognize your claim, and advise that you make no rash movements.

"ALGERNON DAVIS."

Later that day, Jack and Dabol were closeted in an upper room at the Dice-Cup, with a table, a bottle of wine and glasses between them.

Also, in front of him, Dabol had spread out the same letter which Mr. Davis had some hours before sent to Blossom, and was reading it over for the second time.

"Well, I hope so," he was saying, in answer to some previous remark on the part of Sedley.

"For my part in this somewhat complicated business, I want to see some pay before long."

"Humph! You needn't get in too great a hurry," Sedley sneered. "You'll get your 'whack' in due time; indeed, I fancy it would be poor policy for you to play off flunk at this late day."

"Oh, yes—perhaps! Well, we won't quarrel, for I'll wait awhile longer, at least. Now then, you anticipate the gov'nor will show fight in this matter, do you?"

"Very naturally, yes. He don't believe that the tramp is Blossom, as you can see by the letter, and he'll require better assurance before he acts. It was by merest chance that I got onto it. Uncle, not long ago, gave me Bertie's antecedents, and when I heard the drunken rogue down-stairs declare that he was Bill Blossom, I foresaw outcroppings for a possibly profitable scheme. So I jumped him, and got him to write the letter he sent to Davis through us. First of all, I bluffed him, and charged him with being an impostor, and this put him out a little, so that finally, without admitting the possibility of such an imposition, he wished my assistance in establishing him in his rights. He offered me his friendship, the permission to marry the girl, Bertie, and finally the promise of a snug little sum of such money as his proven identity will enable him to secure from my uncle. Not a bad thing, eh, after our first unsuccessful attempt?"

"But do you want the girl?"

"Hardly. She evidently cares nothing for me any longer, and I would hardly crave a woman who did not. Mayhap I shall have to marry her, but if I can wiggle my fee out of Blossom without, she can go to Jericho."

"Humph! From what I saw of the fellow, he is close, avaricious and hard to 'draw on,' unless he is going to satisfy his own appetite for strong drink. He is a bum, in the most emphatic sense, and if you get rich off of him, it will surpass my reckoning. Besides, it is not helping matters much, as to our future welfare. Davis is not going to let the sick business drop—not with me, even if he does with you. He's too shrewd for that. I fancy that, even now, he has men on the outlook for the girls, Fanny and Zella, and as soon as he can get their evidence, or, at least, that of Fanchon, concerning the drugs, he'll endeavor to make it warm for me. If I don't get some hold upon him, as a sort of counter-irritant, you see, there'll be no hope for me but to pack my gripsack and hang up my shingle elsewhere."

"True. But we've summarily disposed of one formidable obstacle; why can we not boost another? I have the right scheme, I think."

"What is it?"

"This!" in an undertone, and with occasional suspicious glances around, the rascally nephew unfolded the points of a plot, which we will for the present withhold from the reader.

Dabol listened, with occasional nods of approval, until Sedley had finished.

"Undoubtedly your plan is a good one, and, if worked right, must result in our favor. By the way, do you believe the rough is the genuine Bill Blossom?"

"I do not, candidly, but no one, aside from

you, will ever be the wiser. I want to work the fellow," was the response.

And what of the entrapped Sleuth?

Down—down, he went, seemingly to his death, in what appeared to be a mere flue in the well. With the instinct of self-preservation he touched the sides of the well, or flue, and, almost before he was aware, his momentum was stopped by the well-digger's trick for safety, which he had often seen performed.

He had arrested his fall by "wedging" in the well, but, what then? He thought, rapidly:

"If I go up, I reckon I won't get out—ef I go down, I won't nuther, and so I don't know what to do," he soliloquized, as he stuck to the vantage ground he had gained. "But I can't roost here very long, that is certain. I'll have to take my chances on the ground floor, I reckon, so here goes!"

The conclusion once formed, he began his descent, by clinging first to one brick and then another, and in this way continued, several hundred feet it seemed to him, before he touched the bottom.

When he did finally reach it, he found himself not in water, as he had half-anticipated would be the case, but on a hard uneven brick bottom, and in the midst of a smell that was not delightful.

"Jeewhittaker! smells like I'd struck a graveyard down side up, in China!" was the young detective's first comment. "Oh! Lordy! what a perfume! Bet a box o' Bixby's thet I've struck a slop-bason, or sewer, or sumthin' of the kind. Ef she am a sewer, I'm free—by blackin'!"

Bethinking himself of the fact that he had matches in his pocket, he produced one, and lit it, and thereby was enabled to momentarily inspect his surroundings. The shaft above had evidently been built directly over what had originally been a well, but the absence of water in it was now accounted for by the fact that a sewer had been cut so near the bottom of the well that it was perfectly drained.

The sewer Billy discovered by the opening into it, from the well, was large enough to admit of a person's walking through it in a bent position, and Billy hailed the discovery with delight.

"Stink though she may, I'll grin and bear it, till I git out inter fresh air—then ye sons of Black Bags, look out fer me! I'll work up yer case fine, an' trap ye when ye ain't calculatin' on it!" he said, as he groped forward into the uninviting subterranean passage.

It might be a journey of miles, and a disgusting one at that, but he knew life and liberty loomed up before him in the distance.

CHAPTER XII.

A BOLD ATTEMPT.

Two days passed by.

Mr. Davis made no move to accede to the proposal of the man Bl ssom, and as that person had not been heard from, since his first introduction, it became pretty evident to Mr. Davis that he was waiting to hatch up some proof of his identity before proceeding with the case.

The night of the second day succeeding that which witnessed the planning of a conspiracy between Dabol and Jack Sedley, was a dark one, in the extreme, accompanied by a fierce wind and rain—a storm more like the "Equinox" later in the season.

Very few pedestrians were on the street, and the storm seemed to rather increase than diminish, as the night progressed.

It was some time after the midnight hour, when two men enveloped in oilcloth coats and with slouched hats pulled down over their eyes vaulted over the fence into the Davis lawn, and made their way stealthily through the dark shadows toward the stately old Quaker mansion.

That their purpose was not legitimate, was evident by their suspicious glances on either side.

Their faces were not entirely concealed, and a close observer might easily have made them out as Jack Sedley and Dr. Dabol.

Whenever there was the least lull in the storm, they would pause and wait until it raged fiercer—then they would resume their approach to the mansion.

"I am not so powerfully impressed with this little venture as might be," Dabol declared. "If we should be caught this time, I don't allow we would get off as easily as heretofore. And, then, if you are not sure where the old man keeps his money, we are running a big risk, with no assurance of finding it."

"I am not so hopeless," Sedley replied. "I am pretty sure he keeps much of his wealth in a strong old chest in the attic in preference to trusting it in a safe or bank, but I am not exactly positive, as he never gives any one any clew. However, we can explore the place—the money *must* be ours before we leave the house."

They soon reached the rear of the mansion, and took the precautionary measure to stop and listen.

But, above the roaring of the wind and storm, it was impossible to hear anything within the house; all was dark and motionless; evidently the house was in deep repose.

"So far, so good," Sedley whispered. "I don't apprehend any trouble after we effect an entrance. This back door is the only one in the establishment that is not bolted on the inside, but I fancy that I have a key which will fit it."

And after trying several keys, he at last found one that unlocked the door, and they softly entered the kitchen.

From here they had no difficulty in passing through the spacious dining-room into the hall, whence a staircase led to the upper floors.

Being carpeted, they had little or no trouble in gaining the attic floor without noise.

The attic door was locked, but for this lock Jack had provided; one of his several keys threw the bolt, and opening the door, they entered and closed it behind them, after which Sedley produced a bull's-eye lantern and turned on the light.

This attic had no windows. It was simply a rough chamber, unlathed, unplastered and uncared for. Cobwebs and wasp-nests abounded, and the usual amount of trash was there to be found.

Among this "lumber" was a powerfully-built chest, noticeable for its rivets, bolts, bands and locks.

"There! *that's* the box!" Sedley announced, pointing it out. "It may be innocent of secreting what we want, but only when we find the chest empty shall I believe that the money is *not* there."

"But how are we to get that infernal old safe open? It will need the assistance of a blacksmith and sledge."

"Not by any means. Patience will accomplish a great deal. All that is required to be done is to saw off the hasps of the locks, and with your assistance we can soon do this."

And he was right. Producing the bank burglar's fine steel finger-saw, which worked almost noiseless when well oiled, they soon had the hasps off and the lid up, and behold! there, in the bottom of the chest, were several packages wrapped up in bright brown paper.

"There!" Sedley exclaimed, triumphantly; "didn't I tell you? That is *money!* and it's ours—ours! do you understand?—the money is ours!"

"Yes, so it seems," the doctor responded, rubbing his hands gleefully. "After all, it has not turned out so bad a night's job, if we succeed in safely making our escape."

"Which you will not do. You have gone just far enough!" a coolly confident voice exclaimed, and when they looked around, startled, they saw Zella, the Gypsy girl, standing in the doorway, with a pair of revolvers in her hands!

Had it been Satan himself who stood there, the two rascals could not have been more surprised than they were—especially Sedley. He stood as if transformed into a statue, and his features wore a grayish pallor that did not harmonize well with the fiery glare of his eyes.

"Diana!" he gasped.

"Villain!" she returned. "Dare you face me and call me that pet name? You wretch! I am no longer Diana; I am Zella, queen of my tribe!"

The doctor, quick to act, began to move toward the door.

"Don't dare to approach me or you are a dead man!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "You are a brute I would delight to shoot. Back, I say!"

And cowering before those lurid eyes the scoundrel slunk away behind his confederate.

"Diana! You surely do not mean—" began Jack, cringing, but she interrupted:

"Don't dare to address me by that familiar name! Your foul lips pollute it!"

A noise attracted her attention. Some one was coming up the stairs, and she turned to behold Mr. Davis himself, who, aroused by the voices, had come to investigate.

"Dabol—Jack!" he ejaculated, as he stepped within the room and saw the two men at bay. "What does this mean?"

"It means that we followed this girl here, suspecting her motive to be robbery, and that she has turned the tables on us by getting us cornered to this room, and holding us here at the point of the pistol—making us appear in the unenviable light of robbers."

"I presume you recognize the truth of this

statement, Mr. Davis," Zella said, with sarcasm.

"I plainly see that these villains have been aiming me another blow, even after I had mercy on them. This time they shall by no means fare so well. Hold them where they are until I can telephone for the police."

"You bet I will! and death be to him who offers to escape!" Zella cried, heroically.

Mr. Davis hurried down-stairs, leaving the brave Gypsy girl holding two human tigers at bay.

"It's no use of submitting, when we can fight!" Sedley said to Dabol. "If we hesitate, we are lost. Draw your 'pop' quickly and make for the door. Shoot the girl through the heart, if she does not get out of the way. I'll be close behind you."

Zella saw them with their heads together—knew that they were plotting mischief—grasped her weapons firmer and with resolve.

"You'd best make no rash move, as I shall surely shoot you, if you do!" she warned.

"Will you?" Dabol hissed, his hands thrust in his outside coat pockets.

The next instant there was a pistol report—smoke issued from either of the pockets, and Zella staggered and fell to the floor with a scream.

"Quick!—now or never!" Dabol cried, leaping over the prostrate girl and dashing down the stairway, while Sedley followed, hearing the package found in the bottom of the chest.

Three stairs at a time they cleared until they were on the first floor, when they tore open the front door and escaped into the grounds.

Of their escape Mr. Davis knew nothing until he heard the pistol-shots, when he rushed from the library, where he had gone to telephone for the police, and found Zella senseless and bleeding, where she had fallen.

Bertie had also been aroused, and had already arrived on the spot, in a state of astonishment and horror.

"Papa! what does it mean?" she asked tremulously.

"It means," said Mr. Davis, staggering across the room to the chest, and noting the fulfillment of his worst fears—"it means that I have been robbed, and this girl been murdered by your was-to-have-been husband, and Dabol, the doctor. My God! I am ruined!"

Many men who had had more experience in the world would have made a great cry over the robbery and attempted assassination, but not so with Mr. Davis.

He very well knew that the rascals whom he had to cope with, would be low in the future, and that if he hoped ever to gain any clew of them or the stolen money, it must be by stealth.

He therefore resolved to hush the matter up, and bide his time, and the results which were to follow.

Zella was picked up and taken to Bertie's room, and an examination made of her wounds. She had sustained a harmless flesh cut in one of her arms, and a bullet had grazed the side of her head with sufficient closeness to cause her to faint—otherwise she was unhurt.

Bertie skillfully fixed up the wounds, and in-

sisted that she should remain in quiet for the present, until fully restored.

In the mean time Mr. Davis had arranged with the only one of the servants who had heard of the disturbance to keep mum, and so the city missed an opportunity to gossip over what had occurred at the Davis mansion.

On the following morning Mr. Davis went into town for the first time since his sickness in search of Billy.

Of all persons he most desired to see the young Sleuth—but he was doomed to disappointment.

Although he inquired for Billy in the haunts that had always known him, he failed to learn any tidings of him. None of his bootblack associates, even, knew where he was, and were positive they had not seen him for several days.

"I fear that some harm has come to the poor lad," the ex-merchant muttered, as he rode homeward, "and if such be the case, I have no need to guess who harmed him. This is a sad hour for me, and I would now that Lyle were back with me. Faulty though he was, he was my son, and instead of dealing sternly and rebukingly with him, I should have tried to approach and reform him, in a kinder manner. And Bertie too, I fancy, would welcome him back, eagerly. Oh! Lyle, my son, come back, and all will be forgiven and forgotten!"

Mr. Davis was sitting in his library the next day, when a servant brought in a card—a dirty-looking affair, on one side of which was engraved the three-spots of clubs, while on the other was written, in a rude, scrawling hand:

"BILL BLOSSOM, Esq."

Mr. Davis's face assumed a frown as he noted the signature, and the frown was followed by a worried, weary expression.

"You may show the fellow up!" he said, and the servant departed.

"I may as well see him now as any time, and settle this matter," he said, his head bowing. "God knows I can do no more than for the best."

The servant soon returned, ushering in a man who came very nearly to the estimate Mr. Davis had made of him.

He was short and thick-set in figure, but in face spare, wrinkled and whisky-burnt. The combined expression of bull-dog ferocity and drunken shrewdness was added to the stubble-bearded face, the eyes of which were bloodshot and swollen.

His attire was shabby and dirty, and a rough cap was pulled down partly over one eye to shade a terrible bruise he had received there, probably in a drunken row.

"Mr. William Blossom," the servant announced, and then retired.

"Mr. Blossom, be seated, and state your errand," the ex-merchant said, briefly.

"Yas, I reckon I will," Blossom responded, tumbling into an easy seat. "My legs ain't 'zactly tew rights ever since I left the main deck, w'at with poor grog and the like. Well, old schoolmate, how has the world used ye since I shipped aboard the Mary Jane?"

"I fail to recognize you as any old school-

mate of mine, sir. You are no more or less than an impostor, sir!"

"I ain't—I'm Bill Blossom, an' I kin prove it. Yer game won't work, ter keep the money which I gave ye—not much! Ye kin keep the girl—I never was much a hand fer 'em—but I want the cash, an' I'm goin' ter hev et, or this place—see? Ye say ye don't believe I'm Bill Blossom—but mebbe ye remember that," and raising his left hand, he showed where the tips of each four fingers had been amputated near the first joint!

Mr. Davis grew pale. All hope died out, for he knew that the original Bill Blossom had been a victim to the same misfortune.

"Eh! see?" the bumner chuckled. "Well, I'm Bill Blossom, and either hand over my cash, or I will foreclose the mortgage to-day!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BILLY SCORES, BUT SOMEBODY LOSES.

IN the course of our narrative we see fit to pass over another lapse of time—a month in length—and note a few changes that have occurred in the lives of those we deal with in subsequent and preceding pages.

From the old home of his forefathers Algonon Davis had departed. Where? Well, perhaps if you wereto ask all of his old acquaintances, they could not tell you. Few in all Philadelphia's cosey homes knew what had become of ex-merchant Davis, whom report credited with retiring from business a half-millionaire, until, said Busy Tongue, one day came along a mortgage of long standing, and swept away everything, even to the smallest article not personal.

And the Davises had gone forth, and died out of existence, as it were, so far as knowledge of them was concerned.

The new proprietor, Mr. William Blossom, of Australia, had assumed possession.

When the notice of the foreclosure of the mortgage had been given him, Mr. Davis had said:

"Sir, if you are the real William Blossom, as you claim, here is all I have—take it. Your money is gone, beyond my reach, and I will make all the reparation possible."

It had been a bitter blow to Bertie, who disbelieved Blossom to be her father. She had never known the meaning of want, but she bore all the humiliation bravely, and when the trunks were packed which contained their few personal effects, she turned to Zella and said, softly:

"Come with us. You and I are both young, and we can work for him," and she glanced at Mr. Davis. And so they had gone forth, hand in hand, as it were, into the un pitying world.

In a small street in the southern part of the city, they rented a four-roomed brick cottage, and with a brave will prepared to battle for a livelihood. Bertie parted with a portion of her jewelry at a pawnbroker's shop, and with the money thus raised, purchased the few pieces of furniture, bedding, etc., necessary to comfort.

Zella, being an expert in bead and needle-work, hung out a sign, and in a day after leaving the Davis mansion, they were once more housekeeping.

And when, nearly a month later, we look into the little cottage, there is still another change.

Upon a bed in the front room lies Mr. Davis, pale and emaciated, with Bertie by his bedside, fanning his heated brow, looking herself less fresh and rosy than a month before, while Zella seated by the window, plies her needle rapidly.

"Poor child, would that I had never lived to bring you to this poverty," the old gentleman was saying.

"Oh! papa, *don't*. It pains me to hear you talk so. Something may yet turn up that will bring us good luck and restore what is lost, Zella is full of hope!"

The Gypsy smiled as she spoke up:

"Yes, Mr. Davis. I am sure all will be right yet."

"Bless you for your devotion to us! But for you we should have fared much worse than we have," Mr. Davis said. "Do you know where your sister is, Zella?"

"No, sir. I have not seen her in a long time—not since over a month ago. She is good, Fanchon is, but she is strange, and I don't believe she will ever rest easy until she knows Jack is dead—then she will know I am free and safe."

"Have you a father living?"

"Possibly, although we do not know for certain. He left us and our band, when we were but small, and we have never heard from him, since."

At this instant there came a rap on the door, and Zella ran to open it.

Then she started back, for a stranger stood there—not a stranger, either; for Mr. Davis sat up suddenly in bed:

"Jack Sedley, you are not welcome, here," Mr. Davis cried, recognizing him, in spite of his disguise of a long heavy beard.

"Oh! I am aware of that; I merely wanted to hunt you up, in order to remind you of by-gone days!" was the retort, and then, with a villainous laugh, he tipped his hat, and strode away.

In the mean time where was the Boy Sharp—the irrepressible Sleuth?

Had he ever escaped from the sewer, and, if so, what had become of him?

The night of the same day on which occurred the events last mentioned, a boat left South street wharf, and was pulled across the river toward the New Jersey shore, at Camden.

Both the occupants were clad in oil-cloth coats, and wore slouched hats, and full black beards, that most effectually hid their faces from view.

Prior to leaving the dock, the man who held the oars had been waiting for some time for the other man to put in an appearance, but he had finally come, and they had started.

"You were deuced long a-coming, Doc!" the man of the oars growled, as he sent the boat flying out into the stream. "You no doubt thought I'd wait all night for you?"

"Oh, no, Jack, I hadn't the least idea of the kind," the other replied. "I got aboard too much wine to-day, and came near not getting here at all."

"Humph! I see your voice is thick enough yet. You'd better take an oar and brace yourself up, or the 'boys' will get into your boots—the 'old boy,' especially."

The new-comer did not reply, and so the other maintained a silence.

In due time they reached South Camden, and, as soon as they left the boat, clambered into a hack, driven by a negro, and were whirled away.

"I suppose you know, Doc, why I sent for you?" the man who had rowed said.

"No," the other grunted. "Why?"

"Because our safety is all in our eye, and the sleuths are on our track. We've got to do something with the girl."

"Who is after us?"

"Who do you suppose? That accursed little vagabond we—well, you know what—he is alive, and about the city."

"Billy, the Snoozer?"

"Yes—the same."

"Not in his old vocation?"

"No, he is in disguise. I saw him to-day, in the street, dressed to kill, and wearing a false mustache. He would have passed unnoticed among a thousand, but I spotted him. Afterward I saw a rough-looking loafer dogging my footsteps, whom I suspected to be him, as his face was bewhiskered beyond recognition. In short, if we are not sharp, he will hunt us down, and if ever we get into his power, we'll get a job breaking stones over at Moya, for a long term."

"Pshaw! you're nervous, Jack."

"Hardly. I am on my guard. If you want to go up, I don't."

"Nor I. Still, I haven't much doubt but that I shall have to get out of Phila.," the other replied, grimly. "D'ye think that the Snoozer will be hunting after the girl?"

"Yes. She is literally one of his pards, and he will seek to find her, even before finding us."

"Then what do you propose doing with her?"

"There is but one thing to do—she must either swear by all her fondest hopes of Heaven never to offer the poisoning, or any other charge against us, or she must die. Better, perhaps, the latter way, as dead men or women tell no tales."

For some distance over the sandy Jersey pike they rode on, until finally the cab stopped, and the darky opened the door.

"Hyer we is, boss!" he announced, pointing to a two-story frame dwelling by the roadside.

"All right, Sam. You can drive on a couple of miles, and by the time you get back we will be ready to return," Sedley said—for it was he—as he and the "doctor" left the carriage. "Be sure you go two miles, and drive slowly, and yell out for us when you return, as we may be busy."

The darky nodded understandingly, hastily mounted the driver's box and drove away.

Sedley then led the way into the house, which was evidently untenanted, and to a back room on the second floor.

This he unlocked, and pushing Dabol in ahead of him, followed himself, and locked the door after him.

The room they entered was plainly furnished so as to constitute a bedroom, kitchen and sitting-room, and its only occupant, aside from the two intruders, was a young woman who was sitting by a table in the dim light of a flickering candle.

This was Fanchon Flint.

She arose as her two enemies entered, and stood regarding them with flashing eyes.

"Yes, I see you are still here," Sedley greeted, mockingly. "I was really concerned lest you should have taken your leave. Ha! Rather a grim joke, eh, Dabol?"

"Haw! haw!" laughed the "Doc," hoarsely—so strangely that the partner of his crimes took a second glance at him. "Bad joke. But proceed to business, as we have no time to parley."

"Yes, that's a fact," Sedley assented. "The fact is, my beloved Miss Fanchon Flint, we have come here on business—imperative business—which concerns us all. After mature reflection, I and my pard here have come to the conclusion that you are too dangerous a piece of womanity to be left lying around loose, and therefore a summary disposition of you is necessary. You have either to take a solemn oath never to tell what you know against us and never attempt to betray us, or you die here, and at once, and this room shall constitute your tomb, until some straggler happens along to take pity and bury your bones."

"Monster! as base as I have always known you to be since your cruelty to my sister. I never supposed murder was your forte, as a last resort."

"But you see it is. Desperation will nerve a man to do anything, and I am desperate now. You have a chance for life if you choose to accept of it—if not, you die. So decide, at once."

"You know very well what my decision will be, you villain! You know that there is not one cowardly thread in the head of Fanchon Flint, and consequently, she would be a fool to accept your terms. I'll promise you nothing—nothing, except vengeance, when I get free!"

"Freedom you will never know, except in death. Dabol, you drop her, and if you don't do it scientific, first pop, I'll finish the job."

"Is *that* so?" said the other, as he drew a revolver, and cocked it.

But instead of turning it upon Fanchon, he suddenly leveled it at Sedley himself.

"Stop! hold on—what do you mean?" the astonished rascal cried.

"I mean that yer off yer kerbase—that you're nor'west o' yer horizon!" was the cool retort, and off came the false beard and slouch hat, to reveal the dirty, fearless face of Billy, the Snoozer. "It means that you're n. g., Mr. Jack Sedley. Yer head ain't no good fer schemin', an' if I was you I'd go rent it out to pound rocks with."

"Billy! Billy! Is it indeed you?" Fan cried, while Sedley shrunk back, with an oath, before the steadily-aimed revolver.

"Pervidin' et ain't me, et ain't nobody else, 'ca'se thar ain't only one feller in Phila. w'ot loks jest like me, an' he's got a wart on his nose; 'spect it growed thar a-purpose, so we could be distinguished apart. Yes, it's me, you bet, an' as I hadn't been somewhere in a dog's age, I thort I'd take an excursion with his nibs, Sedley, an' knock over a bird w' a chunk o' lead, by way of divertisement."

"How the deuce did you come to know of my

coming, and get ahead of the doctor?" Sedley growled, savagely.

"Oh! that's one of the little tricks of my trade. As well might you ask how doth the busy little bee, know when to go on a suckin' exposition arter honey. Echo ans'ers 'by observation.' I got in a double beat on the doctor, or, thet is, he got off his track, an' I switched on. Accidents will happen, on ther best o' railroads."

"And, I suppose it is your idea that you've got me foul?" Sedley sneered.

"Yas, I allow I've got you sized down purty fine. Fu'stly, p'izen; second, captain o' the I. O. O. G.—Independent Order of Ghouls; thirdly, sneak-thief, and robber of Mr. Davis, and last, would-be murderer. Yes, I think I've got you purty well coiled in."

Another oath, more bitter than the first, burst from the rascal's lips.

"You cursed vagabond, if I get my claws on you, I'll make it a sorry day for you that you ever meddled with my business."

"Oh! I know you're spiteful as a wassup, but I sha'n't give you a chance to sting me. You chucked me under, once, but I opine you found that it wouldn't work. I ain't goin' to hang you, however, at present, as I ain't no court. I'm jest a-goin' to let Fan go through yer pockets, an' see if you've got any of Mr. Davis's money; then, if we can't entice you to reveal the location of the plunder, we'll give you the hospitality of this place, till—well, till you're wanted. Up with your hands!"

He obeyed.

He knew it was for his best.

At Billy's suggestion, Fanchon searched his pockets, but found no money, and only a couple of letters.

Soon after, Sedley was tightly bound and then locked in the room, while the two friends, were speeding back toward Philadelphia.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEDELY GETS LEFT.

Of course Sedley did not long remain a prisoner in the isolated old country farm-house, for the negro ere long came to his rescue, and going back to Camden there met his partner in crime, Doctor Dabol, who had crossed the river to find his confederate. Adjourning to one of their haunts the two men sat down to compare notes and discuss the critical condition of their affairs.

"With these young devils at liberty, it will be hazardous for us to go back to the city," Dabol declared. "The boy, Billy, is keener than lightning, and I've about come to the conclusion that the likeliest thing we can do, is to locate in some other country."

"Perhaps you are right; but not just yet. There's one more work to do, before we leave this field of action—more, by a long sight. I've got something else on the string, which promises us large returns, pecuniarily. Read this!"

He reached in his pocket for a letter evidently, but it was not there.

"Ha! it is gone!" he exclaimed. "I remember, now—the girl, Fanchon, took a letter, when she searched my pockets, and probably that was the one I want."

"What was it—anything of importance?"

"To me it was, but I don't allow they'll make much out of it. It was a letter from the genuine Blossom."

"What?"

"A letter from the genuine Captain Blossom. I was up at the old mansion, yesterday, playing poker with the bogus Bill, when this letter came to the house, addressed to my uncle, Davis. Blossom was about to open it, but I prevailed upon him to let me have it, as I wished to deliver it to the one for whom it was intended. When I got away from him, I opened the letter, and what do you suppose I found? Nothing less than a letter to uncle from the original Blossom, which had been handed to a fast mail steamer, which the Mary Ann had hailed."

Dabol put up his hands in surprise.

"The deuce will be to pay now," he said, with a grimace. "What was the purport of this letter?"

"It read in about these words, as I recall it:

"DEAR DAVIS:—Perhaps of all living men you will least expect to hear from me after sixteen years' absence, but as we are about to be passed by a homeward mail, I write to inform you that the Mary Jane, with all its former crew, with the exception of Dick Flint, one blarsted shark, will touch port about the last of the month, rev r to go on another voyage, as sixteen years in the Indies trade has fattened all our lockers to that extent that we can afford to rest. And how I long to see that little girl of mine whom I intrusted to your care, and my brave boy, whom I placed in a charitable institution, knowing he would be reared the best there. They must be both grown up to man and womanhood, now, and I shall look forward to meeting them and yourself, with great eagerness. If you have met with reverses in life, Davis (which, by the way, we are all subject to), do not let that worry you, for I've enough for all. If you've anything left of what I left you, it's yours, and the mortgage shall be canceled. So look out for me—all hands on deck—hurra!

CAPTAIN WILLIAM BLOSSOM."

"That's the style of letter he wrote, and it would seem our revenge on the old man ain't a-goin' to be so sweet, after all."

"No. What schemes have you conceived concerning the matter?"

"I don't know that the matter can affect us, more than that we can make some money out of it. For instance, I'll go and see my dutiful uncle and bargain with him. I'll tell him that I have discovered the real Blossom, and if he will agree not to prefer any charges against us, and allow us to keep the stolen wealth, we'll show him the original B——, who will, as a matter of course, reinstate him according to the promises of his letter."

"You'll not succeed in working him in this way. He'll take advantage of your declaration, and hunt up Blossom the new."

"Perhaps. In that case, I have another string to pull on, pecuniarily. I will go to the bogus Blossom and tell him that the genuine has turned up and is about to boost him out of his present position, unless attended to. If he offers me sufficient inducement, we will lay for the new Blossom and tap him on the head, after which we'll get for parts unknown. If the bogus refuses to come down, we'll enlist to show the other the location of Davis and his daughter, for a stated sum, get the sum in advance, run him into a 'haze' and relieve him of any extra weight he

may be burdened with, and then slope. Oh! I have it figured down pretty fine, but we shall have to be as shy about exposing ourselves as a mink is."

The two scoundrels, donning disguises, crossed by the first morning boat to Market street, and no one on the Philadelphia side of the river recognized them as they left the ferry-house, and hurried away toward Dabol's own residence.

That afternoon Sedley paid a visit to the bogus Blossom, and made known his discovery that the genuine one was on his way to port, if, indeed, he had not already cast anchor.

Although pretty well corned, the usurper received the news with consternation.

"Et's a bad job," he said. "If I'd 'a' thought the captain would come home so soon, I'd 'a' kept out o' it, for he would kill me if he caught me here."

"Of course. And yet you can ill afford to lose the position you occupy!"

"No. I'd sooner lose my hand."

"Then your plan is to adopt a remedy. What will you give to never have the genuine article land on American shores—or any other shores, in fact?"

"I'll give—I'll give you a hundred dollars!"

"What! so much?"

"Is it not enough?"

"No. I'll do the job for you for fifty times the amount you offer, in advance."

"What! five thousand dollars for—"

"Killing a man!—exactly!"

"But I have not so much money in all the world."

"How much have you?"

"Only a hundred dollars."

"Pshaw! you are lying to me."

"No, I am not."

"You have the place here; mortgage it, and—"

"Bah! that would be next to giving it up. I'll give you just a hundred dollars to put the captain of the Mary Jane under water, so that he'll never come to the surface. Take it, or let it alone, just as you please."

"Well, give it to me."

"Swear that you will do the job, first."

"On bended knee I swear, on my honor as a rogue, to see that the object of your antipathy never bothers you, if you pay to me one hundred dollars!" Sedley declared.

"Then, here is the money, and see to it that you do the job well," the bogus claimant said, as he handed Sedley a roll of bills.

"Never fear that you will ever be disturbed by the original," the rascal said, as he rose to depart.

Next in order, Sedley went to visit Mr. Davis in regard to the arrival of the real Captain Blossom.

"It's dangerous, perhaps, but I have few more risks to run in this city, and I'll venture a pegotiation with the gov'nor," he muttered.

He found Mr. Davis alone as he boldly opened the door, and walked into the little front room of the house they occupied—alone, and lying in bed, looking even more pale and wan than he had the last time Sedley had seen him.

"Good-afternoon, uncle!" the unprincipled

casual saluted, as he closed the door behind him, and immediately helped himself to a seat. "Alone, eh? Well, it is all the better for our case."

"Sir!" Mr. Davis cried, raising up on his elbow. "How dare you come here?"

"Because force of circumstances often cause a man to do 'most anything, uncle—because I have something important for you to know. Now you deem me a thoroughbred villain, don't you, and incapable of doing you a good turn?"

"You are certainly a scoundrel, sir, and an ingrate."

"Yes, that may all be, but I am sorry to see you in such circumstances, and have come to aid you. I have intercepted a letter which quite conclusively proves to me that the Blossom now blooming in your former home is not the original—in fact, I know that the genuine Blossom will soon be in the city, and being cognizant of your distressed circumstances, will seek you out, to assist and reinstate you—that is, if I, knowing where to find him, do not intercept and mislead him, so that he will never find you. But, this I do not propose to do, if you will be reasonable. All that I shall ask is that you promise never to move against Dabol or me—that you restore me to position as your son, and endeavor to bring around a match between Bertie and myself; then I will bring forward Blossom; he will bounce the bogus, and everything will be all fixed up like a picture, and trouble will be a thing melted beneath the sunshine of the future."

For a moment Mr. Davis was too surprised to answer—not only at the news, but at Sedley's astounding audacity.

"No, sir. I will hear to nothing of the kind," he answered. "You are an unprincipled knave, and, I absolutely will have nothing more to do with you; so leave this house at once and my sight forever!"

"You old fool. I could throttle you for your obstinacy," the villain cried now white with the rage of baffled purpose.

"Yes, you are doubtless equal to murder; no crime is too base for you to commit, I well know!" retorted the old man spiritedly.

"Curse you, I'll leave my mark on you!" and he sprung from his chair toward the bed.

But the fates were against him again, for as he leaped forward, the front door flew open, and Lyle Davis sprung into the room.

"You black-hearted whelp of Satan!" he cried, and with one blow knocked Sedley to the floor.

Infuriated at his defeat, the latter sprung up and at his adversary, only to get knocked down again, when Lyle, seizing him by the collar, threw him out of doors, as he cried:

"Now begone, you hyena—you grave-robber, you thief, you would-be murderer! If ever I lay eyes on you again to State's Prison you go as sure as my name is Lyle Davis!"

And the now thoroughly cowed wretch hurried away, as if the shadow of the gallows was behind him.

Then Lyle, still standing in the door, seemed to await his father's recognition.

"Oh Lyle, my poor, wronged boy, can you forgive me for my unkindness? Can you come

back to this poor home and share it with us?" pleaded the invalid.

Lyle, closing the door, advanced to the bedside, and taking his father's hand in both his own answered:

"I have wronged you, father; but that is all past now; you shall be no more disgraced by your son. I will stay with you—and Bertie, if she will welcome me as a brother."

"Welcome you? That she will, my boy. She has never ceased to love you, even when, at my instigation, she consented to give her hand to Jack! Oh, what an escape she has made!" and the old man visibly shuddered at the thought.

"But, Lyle, she is going to leave me soon."

"Going to leave you?"

"Yes, my boy, unless you so arrange it that she is always one of the family. Her father is coming home to claim her."

"Well, this is news, indeed. I will keep her if I can, father; for your sake. I will again offer her my hand—undoubtedly to have it refused."

"Ah! you're a scamp, sir! For my sake, indeed! Better say, for all of our sakes—more especially your own! But, I say, Lyle, how came you here so opportunely? It must be you were listening and overheard Sedley's proposal."

"Yes. Billy the Sleuth sent me around; he seemed to know you were going to be disturbed, and I was on time."

"Sedley is going to the dogs fast, and but for the family name, he should answer for his acts toward me."

"Don't you bother with him. Our friend Billy has got his case in hand, and he assured me that it would not be long ere him and Dabol would have no choice but jail or flight. Smart boy that Snoozer, and he'll soon make it too warm in this city for our evil-disposed relative, and his associate. Indeed, if it had not been for my desire to prevent a family disgrace he would have given Jack up to justice weeks ago."

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

THAT evening, while the bogus Bill Blossom sat in the library of the late Davis residence, engaged in the smoking of a grimy old pipe, while he washed the tobacco down with a bottle of wine, there came a knock at the door, and a servant entered.

"If you please, sir, there's a man at the door, sir, as would like to see you, sir," he said.

"What fer lookin' sort o' man, Jim—anybody you know?"

"Reckon not, sir. One o' your own sort, sir."

"Well, show the fellow in, and I'll see what he wants."

The servant bowed, and left the room, and soon after another man opened the door, and entered, in his place.

He was indeed one of the usurper's sort, in point of appearance, being rough and unkempt, and dirty.

He was an older man, too, being probably not less than sixty, while bogus Blossom was not over forty.

"Well, sir, what is your business?" the present proprietor of Davis place demanded, almost before the visitor had seated himself.

"My business is with you," the visitor replied, in a tone and way not calculated to be assuring.

"Can it be you do not know me?"

"No, I do not. I am a stranger in these parts, these sixteen years."

"So I am aware, sir, but that fact should not cause you to forget your old associates and obligations of years gone by."

"What! you are not—"

"I am Ringa, the Gypsy—the chief of the band, to which you once swore fealty, Richard Flint, but which you deserted and tried to betray."

The bogus Blossom winced at the recognition, and shot a nervous glance about the room, as if looking for an avenue of escape.

Ringa's dark Gypsyish face flushed angrily.

"Oh! it won't pay you to try any artful dodges now!" he said, with quiet firmness. "I came here expecting I should have to kill you, in settlement, and I stand ready to do it, if you do not come to terms. You know me of old, Flint."

"Well, what have I done to you to merit yer hatred?" Flint demanded.

"You deserted your fellows, whom you bound yourself by a deadly oath never to desert; more, you deserted your two children, and left them upon my charity, which, I am proud to say, they have always had, when needed. There is a sentence of death on your head, pronounced by your brother Gypsies, and I am, as their chief, bound to see that sentence enforced."

"You would not murder me, man?"

"Surrender all the money you have in the world, to be given to your two children, Fanchon and Zella!" commanded the hard-faced chief, sternly.

"You will get no money of me—I have none."

"You lie! I have had spies after you since discovering who you were, and we all know that you have a plenty of money."

"I insist that you are wrong. Had I plenty of money, I would willingly give it to you!"

"Bah! Hand me over the money, or you're a dead man!"

Flint was no fool; he seemed to read his fate; and, rising, he went to a desk in the room, procured a large roll of bills, and, returning, handed them to Ringa.

As he did so, Ringa suddenly raised his hand quickly above his head, and Flint lay stretched out upon the floor.

There was no report—no cry of pain; it was a proceeding strange, silent and mysterious.

The good ship Mary Jane rode at anchor in Philadelphia Harbor, after sixteen years' trade in the Indies, and after the usual medical inspection by the health authorities, the most of the crew were allowed to go ashore for good, for the Mary Jane had in all probability made her last ocean voyage, owing to her being unsafe as a sea-going craft.

All had gone ashore but the captain and an old sea-dog who was to remain on guard duty. The former was gazing from his position by the lee taffrail toward the imposing river frontage of the Quaker City with eyes that glistened with joy.

"How good it seems to be back in one's own

native country," he murmured, stroking his sweeping brown beard; a fine-looking man in the prime of life, and much at contrast with the bogus Blossom. "I long to have a moment to run ashore, and inquire if my old-time friend, Davis, is yet numbered with the living."

Just then the guard sung out:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Whereaway?" Captain Blossom asked, as the guard approached.

"Coming direct from shore to the fore, sir."

"Ah, yes, I see. A small skiff, containing two men. Assist them aboard, Ben, and send them to my cabin, if they come on business of importance. The same with any one else who may board us."

Then the captain sought his state-room.

A short while afterward two men entered—the same who had approached in the boat, and who were, it is perhaps needless to tell the reader, none others than Jack Sedley and Dr. Dabol.

Captain Blossom looked up from some writing he was doing at the table, and greeted them with a courteous bow, bidding them be seated.

"No, thank you, we have not time for that," Sedley said. "I come on a matter of business."

"Well, sir, state your errand, then, and I will listen."

"Thank you. Your name is Captain Blossom?"

"It is, sir."

"And presumably you would like to meet your old friend, Algernon Davis?"

"I should, sir, very much."

"And likely you would also be willing to pay something to learn where he and your daughter is?"

"Well, sir, I don't know about that. If I deemed it imperatively necessary, it is possible I might."

"Well, sir, I presume you will find it imperatively necessary. Mr. Davis, I am sorry to inform you, has run through with everything he ever owned, and is now living in abject poverty where you might search for a lifetime without finding him. Your daughter, too, is obliged to steal to get money for them to subsist on!"

"Sir!" Captain Blossom cried, indignantly—"I will not believe this."

"You can do as you please about that. I am merely stating facts, being acquainted with the case, and thought you might be willing to pay for guidance, in order that you might cater to their needs."

"Yes, yes, I see. You are figuring after the money, boldly. What would be your price, sir?"

"Oh! I'll be light on you—say five thousand dollars!"

"Five thousand devils! Why, you infernal land-shark, I've a mind to throw you overboard. No, sir! I won't give you five dollars. You're an impostor and a scoundrel, and the sooner you get off the Mary Jane, the better it will be for you."

"But we don't scare," Sedley replied. "Do you refuse to accept our offer?"

"Absolutely, sir!"

"Then we'll trouble you to unlock your

locker yonder!" and at the same instant they each drew and cocked a pair of revolvers, and leveled them upon Blossom. He had made a move to draw one, but they were quicker, and knowing the folly of drawing a weapon on a man who held the drop, he wisely desisted.

"Ha! ha! you'd better go cautious," Sedley warned. "We're two desperate cases, who don't stop to think the second time before we act. We want your surplus 'swag,' and then—adieu!"

"You had better put down your weapons, gents, for I don't scare, neither. You're too near port to do any bad work, and I'd advise you to get quietly off the boat, if you value your hides."

"We don't value 'em," Sedley sneered. "We value your money the most. We've got it all our own way. The old chap up-stairs is helpless, and so are you. Throw up your hands, so my friend can bind you, or over you go, dead as a shark. No trifling about this business!"

"I defy you, sir. You dare not shoot!"

"You shall see. I'll count three. When I count three, if your arms don't go up, you're a dead man! *One!*"

Captain Blossom stood at bay, his figure drawn erect, his eyes flashing—his face set with stern resolve.

"*Two!*" cried Sedley, grimly.

And still, not an inch did the captain budge.

"*Three, if you dare!*"

It was not Sedley who spoke now, but Billy the Snoozer, who stood in the cabin doorway, with a pair of weapons covering the two rascals, while in his rear, stood several policemen.

"Jack Sedley and Doctor Dabol, you are my prisoners!" Billy cried. "Officer, do your duty!"

"You'll never jail me!" Sedley cried, and before any one could prevent him, he placed a pistol to either side of his head, and fired.

He never moved, after he fell, and before Dabol could do himself any harm, he was secured, and placed in irons.

What remains to be told, can be told in every few words.

Dabol was tried and convicted of the crime of attempted murder of Mr. Davis and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.

Of course Mr. Davis and Captain Blossom met, in due time, and it was a joyful meeting to all.

Blossom immediately restored the Davises to their old home, and in due time there was a double wedding, and Bertie and Zella were the brides.

Mr. Davis, having become deeply attached to Zella, he persuaded the dark-eyed, sad-faced woman to accept his hand, heart and home—a step that neither are likely ever to regret, for she is a devoted wife, loving, gentle and refined, daily enlarging the circle of her admiring acquaintances and never visited by a member of her tribe—who all bid her God-speed! in her new-found happiness.

Strongly impressed with the belief that Billy was his own son, Captain Blossom made diligent search, and proved that it was indeed so.

And so Billy has retired from the blacking business, and it is possible—nay probable—when he gets a little older that he and Fanchon will become "one," for already she has taken his sister's place at Blossomdale, on the Hudson, where the hearty captain dispenses a genial hospitality, and where Lyle and his very contented wife spend many a joyful week.

THE END.

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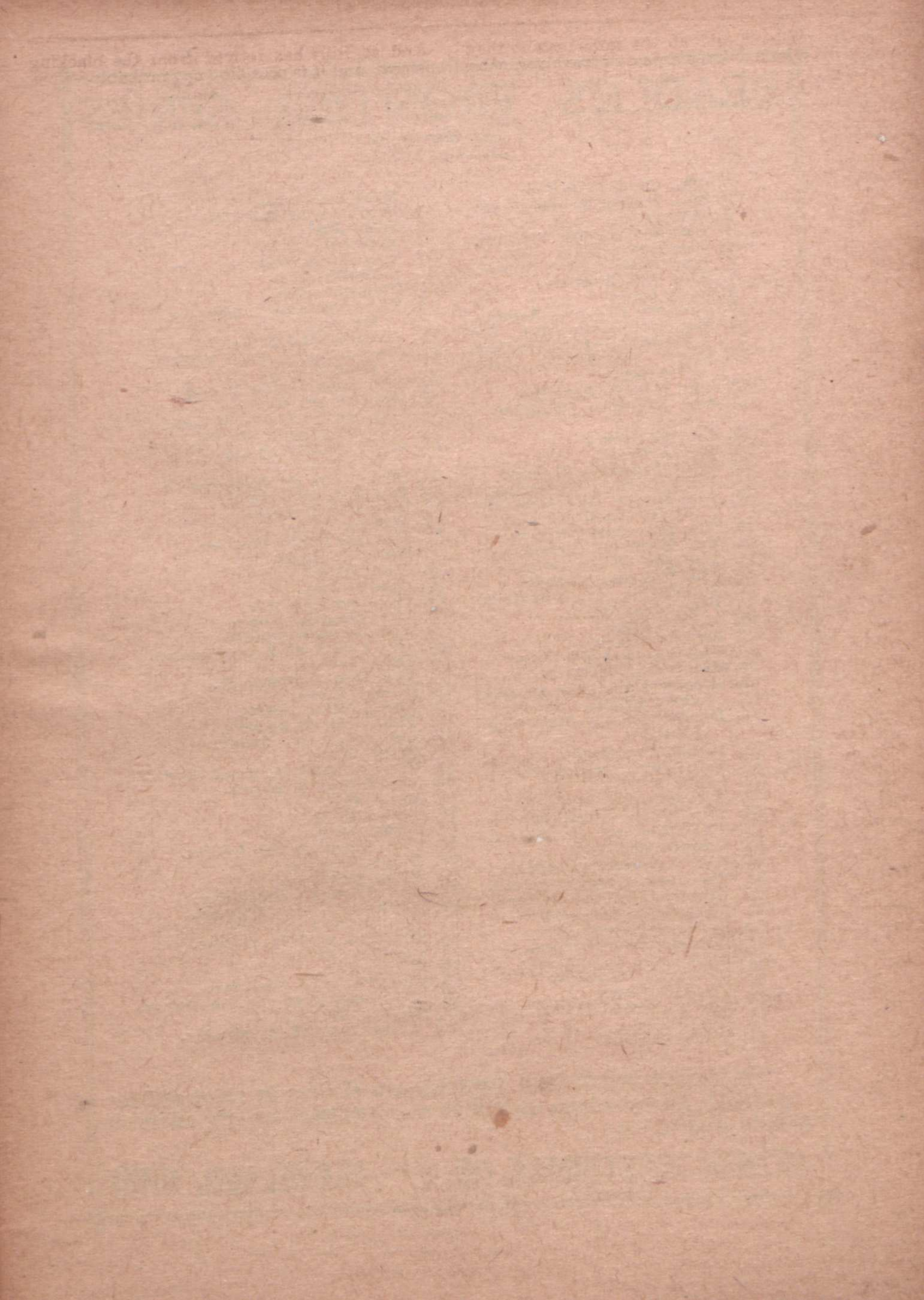
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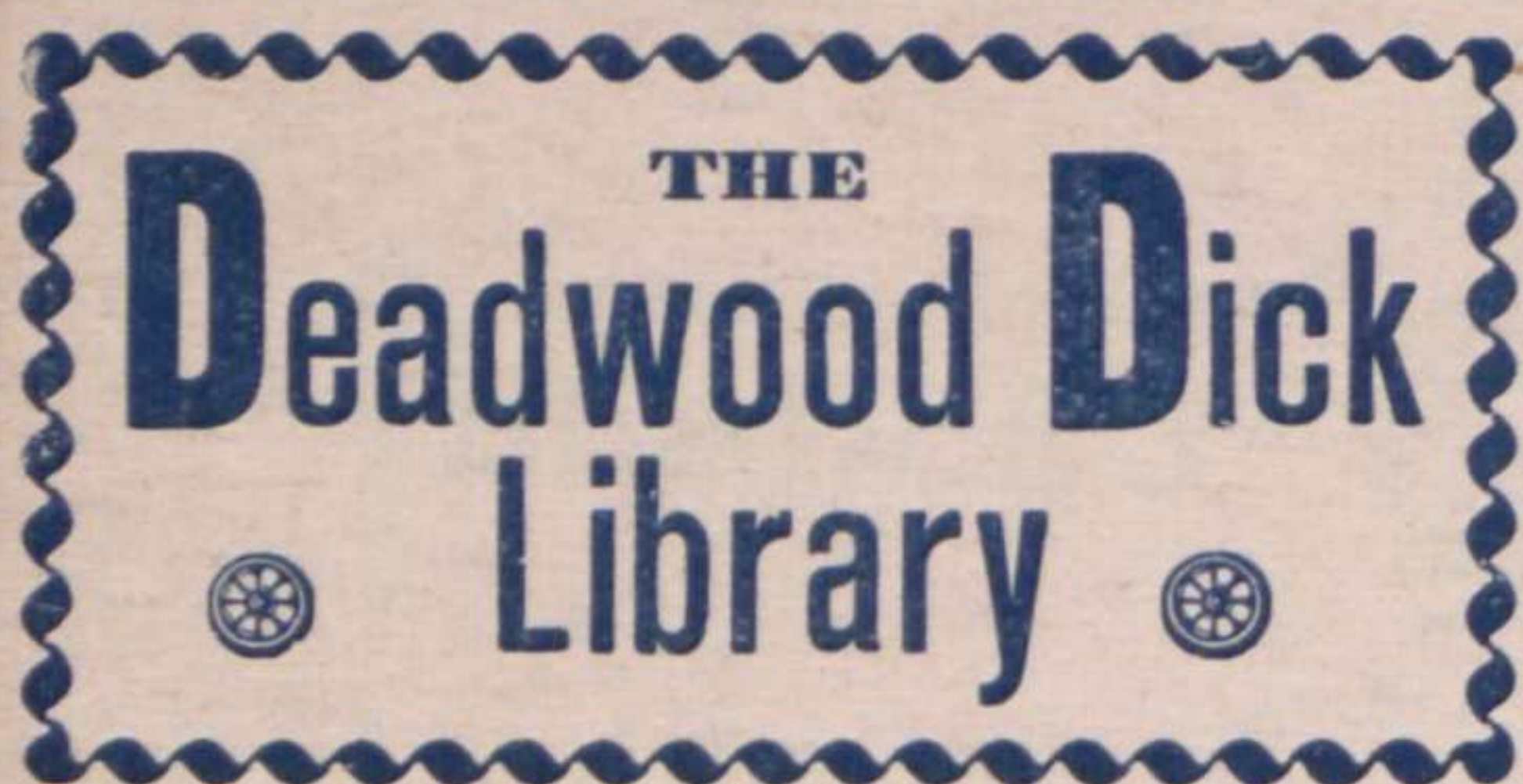
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